'Conscious Consumption' and Activism: An Empirical Reevaluation of the Apolitical and Distracted Consumer

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‘CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION’ AND ACTIVISM: AN EMPIRICAL REEVALUATION OF THE APOLITICAL AND DISTRACTED CONSUMER

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ABSTRACT

‘Conscious Consumption’ and Activism:
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This thesis empirically examines the long-standing critique that consumption is inherently apolitical and a distraction from civic and political involvement. This image of consumers has been particularly salient in current debates about ‘conscious consumption’ motivated by ecological and social justice issues. Whether buying organic or fair-trade actually displaces activism has remained unsubstantiated. Based on the results of an online survey administered to a group of individuals who identify as conscious consumers, regression analyses were conducted to isolate the relationship between conscious consumption and formal and informal activism for over 1700 respondents. The results of the analyses reveal that higher levels of consistency in conscious consumption practices are significantly related to greater social and political involvement on ecological and social justice issues, even when controlling for prior levels of involvement. Respondents also reported higher overall participation rates in general when compared to pre-existing data on nationally representative samples. Consumption is not displacing involvement and activism among these conscious consumers, suggesting that conscious consumption may be an integral element of broader action for many.

‘Conscious Consumption’ and Activism: An Empirical Reevaluation of the Apolitical and Distracted Consumer

Conscious consumption, understood as choices to reduce or alter consumption that are conscientiously made and motivated by values, has a contested role in both public and scholarly discourse. What has been called the “New Consumer Movement” (Schor 2011a) is comprised of individuals and organizations committed to the belief that conscious consumption can effect change in sustainability and social justice movements. However, the legitimacy of consumption as such is undermined by the long-standing portrayal of consumption as either inherently apolitical or as individualizing and distracting from broader political aims. The aim of this paper is to reassess these deep assumptions about consumption using the results of a survey about the consumption and political practices of a group of conscious consumers in the US.

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According to Schor (2011a), the “new consumer movement” (NCM) is comprised of both individual consumers and organizations that are attempting to change the patterns and culture of consumption, and has goals that substantially overlap with ecological sustainability movements and social justice movements (which themselves are often united in their goals and growing more so). To reach the goals of sustainability and justice,[1] the NCM is “address[ing] both the volume of consumption, and the particular choices of products and patterns of consumption made by individuals and households” (Schor 2011a: 3).

[1] Among other goals, such as changing fast-paced lifestyles by reducing work time and re-valuing relationships and community.

There is much debate, however, over the NCM's claim that changes in consumer culture and practices can effect the kind of far-reaching change that conscious consumers are seeking. Specifically, critics claim that conscious consumption will fail because of the individualizing nature of consumption – that conscious consumption displaces political activism[2] and therefore distracts attention from the need for institutional- and policy-level change (as in Maniates 2002). Without institutional or policy change, changes in individual practices may not really be able to have an impact given that individual practices themselves become constrained by the institutional and policy structures. Others go further to claim that consumer action in the marketplace is not only individualizing – it is inherently incapable of being political or effecting change because of the ability of the market to apply the same capitalist logic to the consumers' dissent by turning it into a profitable market niche (Heath and Potter 2004; Smith 1998; Holt 2002). In these critiques, which will be discussed at greater length below, it is assumed that the consumer will not be able to decipher or challenge the "false promises" of the marketer and that the consumer will not think about sustainability after leaving the checkout aisle.

These doubts about the efficacy of conscious consumption emerge from pervasive theories about the nature of consumer culture and the underlying relationship between consumption and other forms of political and social activism. These theories, which will be explored in the following pages, have been hugely influential in scholarly literature as well as in the current public discourse, including leftist and liberal critiques (Soper 2004).

Whether conscious consumption actually distracts from or displaces other forms of political and social activism remains an open, empirical question. There is a dearth of

[2] The terms "activism," "action," "involvement" are used synonymously throughout the paper.

empirical research on the phenomenon of conscious consumption and its interaction with more traditional political and social involvement (Stolle and Hooge 2003), particularly in the US. Broad swaths of alternative or political consumer practices have been empirically investigated in other countries focusing in part on the relationship between the consumer practices and other forms of social and political engagement (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Forno and Ceccarini 2006). Research on US populations has been limited largely to smaller-scale qualitative research on particular genres of consumption (e.g. Thompson and Coskunner-Balli's 2007 ethnographic research on a small community supported agriculture group). While this research contributes to our understanding of the meaning of conscious consumption among certain groups, there is to date no quantitative empirical work on the overall trends within a group of conscious consumers, particularly with respect to the contested relationship between consumption and traditional or informal political participation.

This research project seeks to fill this gap in the literature. Based on survey data collected from an online listserv of individuals who are, to varying extents, interested in conscious consumption and issues of sustainability, descriptive statistics and regression analyses are used to explore the relationship between conscious consumption and political or social involvement, and to assess whether acts of conscious consumption displace or coexist with broader activism on issues of sustainability and social justice among the respondents.

This work is not assessing the veracity of the green or ethical claims of products and whether businesses are profiteering from well-intentioned (but 'misled') consumers who will buy their "green-washed" products (for example, Michael Pollan's 2001 work

on "Industrial Organic," or Seidman's 2007 work on monitoring). Nor is this work able to assert in any other way that conscious consumption is an effective route to change. Rather, the focus of this paper is to assess the long-standing assumptions about consumption that have come to be prominent in the critique of conscious consumption.

The Case Against Consumption

There are deep cultural and theoretical obstacles to taking consumption seriously as a political or social change-related act. The view that consumer culture is a diversion rather than an active or resistive force itself repeats throughout critical scholarly literature. Scholarly work has long had a productivist bias (for example, the work of Karl Marx), where production is taken seriously and consumption is positioned as lesser: less useful, less rational, less masculine (Sassatelli 2007).[3] From a Frankfort School perspective, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) proffered their influential analysis of the "culture industries," in which corporations grow more powerful as consumers lose their capacity to resist through the "circle of manipulation and retroactive need" and mass production of culture: consumption homogenizes as it distracts from real issues of power. In Galbraith's (1958) description of the dependence effect, he argued that consumers' wants are entirely created by producers.

These portrayals of manipulated consumers often underlie the view that seeking social or political change through the market is ineffective. The ability of the market to co-opt consumer resistance trumps the ability of the consumers to resist (e.g. Frank 1997; Holt 2002). As Holt notes:

[3] Of course, while production is prioritized in society, it needs consumers. Consumption is alternately denigrated and a duty, creating a "schizoid" understanding of consumption that is pervasive (Slater 1997, p. 33; Sassatelli 2007, p. 118). Pro-consumerist visions have a presence in the literature as well (e.g. Twitchell 1999) but are tangential to the discussion here.

> Consumers are revolutionary only insofar as they assist entrepreneurial firms to tear down the old branding paradigm and create opportunities for companies that understand new emerging principles… They never threaten the market itself. What has been termed 'consumer resistance' is actually a form of market-sanctioned cultural experimentation through which the market rejuvenates itself. (2002: 89)

This perspective envisions consumers as inherently lacking political agency in the marketplace. It is important to note, however, that some parts of the New Consumer Movement would not consider "tear[ing] down the old branding paradigm and creat[ing] opportunities for companies that understand new emerging principles" to be such a bad outcome if those new emerging principles lead to greater sustainability or social justice. If companies change their practices in response to consumers, this may be a successful act of resistance from the consumers' perspective (Schor 2011a; Shaw 2007).

Further adding to its apolitical nature, consumption is very closely linked in major theories to the individual and the private. In Veblen's (1899) work on conspicuous consumption, for example, consumption is viewed as motivated by attempts to improve the consumer's status through competition in the consumption of visible goods and leisure. Bourdieu (1984) has also theorized consumption and taste as a means for producing and reproducing distinction and stratification. While both of these theories portray consumption as a form of social communication (as opposed to taking place in a social vacuum), the focus of consumption is the consumers' status or the status of their group.

Theorists of late or post-modernity have retained the importance of social communication in the act of consumption, however they place even greater emphasis in their analysis on individualization. Giddens (1991) noted the increasing importance of

the making of biography and personal identity in the late modern period and the substantial role that consumption plays in that process of identity construction. The turn to the focus on self and identity in consumption practices is part of a larger ethic of private self-empowerment and private action for change (Redden 2002).

Soper (2004) points out that the portrayal of consumption as apolitical and individualized makes sense from a variety of contemporary ideological standpoints. From a classical liberal perspective, consumption is assumed to be an individual, market, and apolitical act. Individual consumption practices are therefore private, almost sacred, and not open to public scrutiny or accountability (Soper 2004). In this line of thinking, one person's consumption is typically not intended to have public impact beyond enhancing the individual's own comfort and pleasure (Slater 1997). Having a political impact through consumption is also incommensurate with the left critique of the consumer as duped and distracted (Soper 2004).

It is not surprising, then, that the view of a distracting, individualized consumption appears in the public debate among environmental activists and scholars about ethical and eco-friendly consumer products. For example, environmental activist and author Paul Hawken told Alex Williams of the New York Times that green products "offer a false promise" and are "distracting from serious issues" (Williams 2007: para. 16).

Within the sustainability and social justice movements, consumption acts as a "distraction" insofar as it leads to a focus on individuals' practices. Andrew Szasz (2007) portrays the consumption of natural or organic products as a "retreat into little consumer bunkers" (172) – an act of what he calls "inverted quarantine" (4) that is motivated by a

desire to protect oneself from a harmful environment (as opposed to typical quarantine, which isolates a diseased individual / environment from relatively healthy individuals and environments). He writes:

> A person who, say, drinks bottled water or uses natural deodorant or buys only clothing made of natural fiber is not trying to change anything. All they are doing is trying to barricade themselves, individually, from toxic threat, trying to shield themselves from it. Act jointly with others? Try to change things? Make history? No, no. I'll deal with it individually. I'll just shop my way out of trouble. (4)

He claims that these are the "obvious" (11) beliefs of this group of consumers, and he takes it for granted that there is nothing more nuanced to be found in the motivations and intentions of consumers. For Szasz, those who take a "consumeristic response" (4) to the environmental threats enact a "resigned, fatalistic environmentalism" (2). These consumers are different from "another person" who "might inform themselves more fully about the issue, join with like-minded folks, try to raise public awareness about the issue, try to get the political system to acknowledge it and deal with it" (4). Since the consumer is not an activist, he asserts, "mass flight into inverted quarantine decreases the likelihood – and defers the day – that something substantive is done about [environmental] hazards" (172).

In addition to the view that conscious consumption distracts from the political because it is self-interested, critics also argue that the greater focus on individuals' practices and responsibilities obscures the practices and responsibilities of institutions. Green consumption is an instance of the individualization of the environmental problem: individuals are asked to assume responsibility for taking action to address climate change to a greater extent than corporations, the government, and other institutions (Smith 1998; Maniates 2002). In this argument, institutions should be taking on more responsibility,

since they not only have their own "footprint" to account for, but they also play a significant role in structuring the alternatives that are available and creating the ethical and political vision of what is possible (Maniates 2002; Sassatelli 2006).

Sassatelli argues that consumption practices therefore cannot be treated as "full political participation." Maniates goes further and contends that alternative consumption in the ecological sector cannot lead to meaningful change, and that it actually leads to a "dangerous narrowing" of our imagination for generating multiple paths to more sustainable living (2002: 47). However, Maniates' claim that political action is stymied by individualized alternative consumption (i.e. feeling content that one did one's part for the planet by buying a bike) is not based on any empirical data and does not appear to be supported by the empirical literature reviewed in the following sections. These claims also appear to overlook the formation of non-traditional, alternative production and provision modes that are often chronicled in case studies (e.g. Seyfang 2006 on food; Clarke et al 2007 on fair trade).

Another caution that Sassatelli (2006) raises is the ability of the market to absorb alternative practices, as noted above in the cooptation theory of action within the market. Heath and Potter (2004) argue broadly that rebellion against consumer culture is not possible. Specifically discussing the practice of reducing consumption through 'downshifting,' they note that it is "based upon the countercultural faith that changing society is ultimately a matter of changing our own consciousness. As a result, it generates a set of highly individualized strategies" and that "very simple, 'superficial' remedies" such as legislation would address the issues more effectively (2004: 155).

Other views of the cooptation of dissent by the market focus on the role of corporations rather than individualization of consumers (though perhaps also assuming that consumers are individualized in the process). For example, Biro and Johntson (2007) and Pollan (2001) describe the case of organic food, the production of which has shifted from primarily small farms to new branches of large agribusiness. This has caused concerns that the original intentions of 'organic' to be not only pesticide-free but also an alternative to industrialized farms and food processors have been lost as large agribusiness creates a successful marketing niche based on their iteration of organic.

Schor (2011a) has noted that this theory of cooptation is a mirror image of the point of view of executives of businesses with "social-mission brands." Their view of cooptation argues that their brands will spread and "co-opt the market for good" (13). Both Schor and Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) contend that the cooptation theory, of the type offered by Biro and Johnston, Pollan, Frank, Sassatelli, and Holt, fail to offer a dynamic understanding of what is happening between business and consumer challengers. These theories assume that when cooptation happens, atomized consumers are not able to recognize it, challenge it, or demand accountability from corporations, and this may not be accurate.

Among those who make the claim that consumption is distracting and apolitical, citizenship is typically counter-posed to the consumer role as if they are in opposition: the public-minded citizen versus the self-interested consumer. Schudson (2007) argues that it is highly improbable that consumption and citizenship can be equated with one another. Consumerism as an ideology is a strong and pervasive force in the US, both at the national level of maintaining the appearance of societal stability through economic

growth and at the individual level of constructing individual identity through one's consumption choices. And, as Schudson argues, citizenship and consumption involve different levels of empowerment and agency, making the slog of the political world seem lackluster in comparison to the world of shopping and spending.

The different perceptions of empowerment and agency here are key. While consumption seems in many ways more immediately empowering and engaging, there are also heightened limitations involved. Compared to traditional political participation, conscious consumption often requires a variety of scarce or restricted-access resources in order to participate: time, money, information (Stolle and Hooghe 2004) and cultural capital.[4] Individuals and households with more disposable income and more knowledge about sustainability (or access to knowledge about sustainability) have disproportionate access to participation. Conscious consumption, then, is often viewed as elitist, which is another reason some analysts do not take it seriously as part of a broader repertoire of action. But inequalities in access to participation in social and political activism are pervasive and persistent (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) – even the "time" needed to participate presents problems of unequal access, though it has more of an "upper bound" to it than income or knowledge (Stolle and Hooghe 2004). Still, the class dimensions of conscious consumption remain an unresolved issue (Schor forthcoming).

While there are good reasons not to equate consumption with citizenship, the constructions of citizen and consumer as opposites are at the same time too simplistic. At

[4] There are many conscious consumption practices that do not require much money, time, or information; yet often trying to be consistent with conscious consumption practices across the board will require some commitment of all three.

the simplest level, civic or political action may be self-interested at times, and consumption may be public-minded (Schudson 2007). But this is a minor point.

The more significant flaw in the counter-posing of citizen and consumer is that they conflate sites and practices (Bowles and Gintis 1983). Sites are places where practices happen (e.g. the state, the market, etc), and types of practices (e.g., activism, engagement, demand for environmental accountability or sustainability) can take place across sites. While the preponderance of types of practice will vary across sites (e.g., democratic practices are more common at the site of the state), effective activism frequently occurs when practices that dominate in one site are transported from one to another. The analysis of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in the 1980s on the transportation of democratic practices from the state to the workplace argued that the demands of workers for democracy in the factory were highly disruptive of normalized power relations (Bowles and Gintis 1983).

The relationship between consumption and the political realm becomes even more complicated with the consideration of the changing nature of political involvement over time. Various authors have documented declines in the rates of traditional political forms of activism in the US over the past several decades (Putnam 2000; Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, and Weffer-Elizondo 2005) as well as the decline of civic / social engagement (Putnam 2000). According to Putnam, elements of political participation (voting rates, attendance at rallies and meetings, signing petitions, writing to politicians or local papers) as well as elements of civic participation (membership in voluntary associations), all have decreased, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While Putnam does find that the number of non-profits and social movement organizations have increased, he also finds

that the membership rates are decreasing and that grassroots protesters are graying. Putnam sees this decline of traditional forms of participation and rise of individualism as detrimental to community and democracy.

Others have also found that the number of traditional activist events has declined from 1970 to 2000, but suggest that the nature of civic events and political participation is changing (Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, and Weffer-Elizondo 2005). Stolle and Hooghe (2004: 271-72), summarizing the work of a number of theorists on "new" civic and political participation, classify the typical characteristics of the new forms along four dimensions: (1) structure – new forms are more loose, horizontal, network-oriented; (2) substantive issues – new forms are more focused on lifestyles than institutional issues; (3) regularity – new forms are more spontaneous and are easier to exit; and (4) style – new forms are more individualized and less group-oriented.

As Stolle and Hooghe note, conscious consumption – which they call political consumption – sounds in many ways like a new form of civic and political participation, but research has not yet fully articulated whether it is fulfilling the same social and political functions as more 'traditional' forms of participation. The following section will explore the current literature that has attempted to position conscious consumption as related to – or even a form of – political and social action.

Empirical Research on Conscious Consumption and Activism

One of the central controversies in the study of consumption and politics is how to understand the relationship between the two. As Shah et al (2007a) ask, "Do political consumerism and logo politics represent new forms of civic participation? Are these forms of participation displacing conventional modes of participation?" (14). Various

researchers have made initial attempts to answer this and related questions. Crockett and Wallendorf (2004) conducted an ethnographic study that examined the expression of political ideology through consumption in a racially segregated US city in the Midwest. They found that consumption is a common site for expressing political ideology, particularly surrounding different reactions to the local issue of limited access to quality goods, such as food, and services, such as banking, experienced by segregated black neighborhoods. In this sense, consumption is understood as politically expressive, but they do not make claims beyond this expressiveness.

In a mixed-methods study of a local organic food network in the UK, Seyfang (2006) found that the organic consumers not only saw their practices as expressive of political orientations but also understood the practices as political actions. Shaw (2007) similarly argues directly that "ethical consumers," in her terminology, understand their consumer actions as political actions. From interviews with ten self-identified ethical consumers in the UK, she found that consumers seeking ethical, alternative consumer choices tended to understand their decisions as political and used the metaphor of casting a vote. In fact, they generally believed their consumer vote to be more effective than traditional political votes.

Seyfang's sample comes from an established network for organic food, and this alternative provisioning structure for local and organic food is an important factor for both creating and maintaining the active engagement of participants. Shaw's ethical consumers consider themselves to be a part of a community of like-minded others who also seek alternative, value-driven consumption choices in the marketplace. While some authors and activists criticize the tactic of seeking social or political change through the

market, believing that the market will simply absorb dissent and make it into a market niche (e.g. Holt 2002), Shaw notes that her ethical consumers see the expansion of alternative and ethical niches as a success. Shaw argues that this may be a success not only because the market has come to be more aligned with the concerns of alternative consumers, but also because it reinforces the ethical consumers' perception of a shared imagined community (i.e. companies' reactions are interpreted as a response to demand from a substantial group of like-minded others). Shaw notes, however, that among her sample ethical consumer communities were largely imagined and, as such, remain somewhat unorganized as a group.

In Leitch's (2003) research on the Slow Food Movement in Italy, the community is not imagined but very real. Leitch frames activism surrounding traditional food making in Italy as part of a broader social movement. She describes the involvement of the Slow Food group (which criticizes the fast-paced, rationalized, homogenized, and de-localized culture surrounding the food industry) in the case of an Italian town whose signature production of pork fat was threatened by new food preparation standards set forth by the European Union. The efforts of Slow Food and local activists were not only aimed at saving the endangered food product; rather, the scope of the issue was widely construed as a movement to challenge the homogenizing force of Europeanization.

In a case study of a fair trade organization in the UK, Clarke et al (2007) argue that understanding fair-traders as individualized consumers substantially underestimates what is happening. They find that members of the fair trade organization generally do not see themselves primarily as atomized consumers in the marketplace. Rather they see their fair trade work as politically and ethically motivated and as an extension of social

networks and civic / political action. Webb (2007) similarly finds the same lack of individualization in a subset of the fair trade movement in the UK focused on coffee. Webb notes that there are various levels within the fair trade networks – an "activist core," organizations, as well as "quasi-organized" consumers on the periphery – but that at the various levels consumers are active and skeptical, rather than manipulated and seduced. Clarke et al suggest, then, that fair trade in the UK stands as an example of how "civic and political participation… can take place in all sorts of mundane locations… at the same time as belonging to spatially and temporally extended networks of advocacy, campaigning, and mobilization" (603). They note, however, that fair trade and ethical trade efforts in the US have been, in general, more organizationally fragmented than in the UK.

One of the most direct empirical explorations of the link between conscious consumption and traditional civic activities is by Forno and Ceccarini (2006), who examined the results of an Italian national survey. They found that about 30% of Italians at the time of the survey (2002) participated in some act of what they call "political consumption" in the previous year. The most common motivations cited by these conscious consumers were the belief that consumption should have social aims and a desire to avoid contributing to injustice. Using logistic regression, the authors found that the odds of participating in political consumption were significantly affected by being a woman, more highly educated, and living in larger cities. Additionally, the odds were significantly and positively impacted by other political participation and higher levels of political interest. Political consumers in their sample tended to be more socially involved (particularly in civic organizations related to environmental, social justice, human rights,

and related causes), more likely to consult traditional and non-traditional news media, more likely to use "word-of-mouth political communication" (211), more likely to vote, more likely to write letters to politicians and newspapers, and more likely to participate in political protests or demonstrations (notably even when the protest issue does not directly match their personal interests).

In a 2000 survey of Danish citizens, Andersen and Tobiasen (2004) found that among the 'political' consumers in the sample women only slightly outnumbered men (by 6%), but that higher levels of education were significantly associated with political consumption. The effect of higher income was spurious when education was also controlled. Similar to Forno and Ceccarini, Petersen and Tobiasen found that political consumption was strongly associated with political interest (211) and other political actions such as signing petitions and donating money to a cause. In a factor analysis, political consumption loaded on the same factor as these other political actions, with the exception of participation in demonstrations (212). The political consumers in the sample were more trusting of government than non-political consumers (214), and saw consumption as less "effective" than voting, getting media attention for a cause, working in associations, or working in political parties (211) – findings that are in contrast to authors who argue that politics is moving into the market because of a lack of a sense of efficacy or faith in traditional political process (Shaw 2007, Maniates 2002). Yet the respondents also considered their consumer actions as more effective than contacting politicians or demonstrating (211).

In one survey of US residents, Shah et al (2007b) used panel regression and path analysis to describe factors that contribute to political consumption. They found that an

interest in politics (particularly talking about politics) and consumption of news help to predict political consumption. These findings are consistent with Forno and Ceccarini's (2006) findings, yet Shah et al's model does not include other measures of political activism or advocacy. Therefore, it remains unclear whether the increased political and civic activism that Forno and Ceccarini find would also be found in a US sample. Shah et al's path model, like Forno and Ceccarini's analysis, attempts to causally explain political consumption as an outcome, rather than positioning it within the model as a potential predictor of political actions.

From an earlier survey, Keum et al (2004 – a group of authors that include some of the same authors from the study by Shah et al 2007b) use structural equation modeling to explore the effects of consumption of news and other media, political orientation, and status orientation on socially conscious and status conscious consumption, also allowing civic participation to have a bi-directional relationship with these consumption variables. They found significant positive interrelationships between status consumption, socially conscious consumption, and civic participation, though the model explains a relatively small proportion of the variance in each of these variables. Their findings challenge the notion that consumption of any type – status-driven or socially conscious – leads to a decline in civic engagement. Their latent civic participation variable is comprised of volunteerism, participation in community projects, and participation in clubs, however, and does not include any form of traditional political participation.

There is some limited evidence to suggest that participation in a few initial alternative consumption practices might lead to the expansion of conscious consumption practices and social and political activism. Some market research has found that

consumers consider eco-friendly consumption to be only the first step in solving ecological problems (focus group work done by the consulting group American Environics, reported in Williams 2007). Williams notes that the research finds that "people considered their trip down the Eco Options aisles at Home Deopt a beginning, not an end point" (para. 39). For many people, green consumption did not make them feel as if they were finished doing their part; rather, as they were doing more green practices they were becoming more interested in and committed to "more transformative political action" on climate change (Williams 2007: para. 40).

In their study of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmers and members, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) similarly found that the members often reported that their participation in the CSA was transformative and influenced their alternative consumption practices in spheres other than food. Since this is based on a limited sample of participants in only one realm of alternative consumption, it is unclear to what degree participation in one type of alternative consumption practice affects other actions that could have political and cultural import.

Conscious consumption presents a challenge to what counts as political and civic participation and what counts as a political arena (Micheletti 2003; Sassatelli 2006). But the empirical research is not only suggesting that conscious consumption is considered by conscious consumers to be politically expressive (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004) or to be a political act itself (Shaw 2007; Seyfang 2006). It is also suggesting that conscious consumption is related to other forms of political and social involvement (Forno and Ceccarini 2006; Shah et al 2007b; Keum et al 2004).

Reconsidering Consumption

Particularly in the post WWII era, the consumer marketplace has been a de-politicized sphere, in contrast to its lively inclusion in labor struggles earlier in the century. In the US, consumers have a substantial history as actors within the political sphere, playing a role in US culture and identity since the time of the Revolution and the Boston Tea Party (Glickman 2001). Consumer activists have used conventional means of political action to procure healthy and safe products and working conditions. Consumers have protested and boycotted for improvements in government regulations of food safety, proper labeling, and workers' rights, and have even used these conventional protest actions to fight for the right to consumer sovereignty and participation, as in Civil Rights demonstrations that aimed to procure, among other things, equal access to the market (Glickman 2001; Cohen 2003; Hilton 2007). More often than not, these political actions were not intended to substantially change the market or capitalist system in radical ways; rather they had goals of reform and expansion (Cohen 2003). There has been substantial diversity in the ideologies, goals, and tactics in the consumer movements, with consumer groups differing on matters from who counts as a consumer to the radical, progressive, or conservative nature of the changes that these groups seek (Glickman 2001). Cohen (2003) argues that this model of conventional political participation by the consumer constituency (what she calls 'citizen-consumer') was historically the most common way that consumption met politics.

It may not be inevitable, then, that consumption is apolitical. Rather, it seems likely that it could be the result of a historical process of de-politicizing that occurred over many decades (Cohen 2003). The political overtones of the consumer act itself have

changed over time. With the international intensification of consumerist orientations after WWII (Hilton 2007) and with the rise of Keynesian economics, the act of consuming was increasingly seen as a way to enable the political status quo – to encourage economic growth (Cohen 2003) and support democracy itself (Glickman 2001, Hilton 2007) – rather than challenge political structures.

Discounting consumer action may be a mistake. After all, consuming excites the passion and engagement of a vast swathe of the population. As our culture has become more and more consumption-centric, consumption is increasingly constitutive of people's identities, emotions, social lives, and psychic preoccupations. In practice, moral and ethical, other-oriented consumption practices seem to be playing an increasingly acknowledged role in the lives of consumers (Schor forthcoming), and self-interest and living standards seem to be increasingly conceived of as bound up with public, political, and ecological issues (Soper 2004). Moreover, the emergence of a new consumer movement also suggests that there may be substantial political potential surrounding conscious consumption (Schor 2011a).

Micheletti and Stolle (2007) examined a branch of this movement – the anti-sweatshop movement – and found that the numerous organizations and networks within the movement were able to *mobilize* consumers for episodic actions as well as long-term cultural campaigns through enabling distinct consumer roles (166). They note that the movement has framed anti-sweatshop consumer action in a way that resonates with many Western cultures and convinces a disparate consumer audience that their individual acts can become part of a broader collective demand for change. While it is difficult to assess

the full extent of the outcomes of the movement so far, the authors argue that it has had some success at changing corporate practices and conditions for workers.

The empirical research reviewed above begins to suggest that green or conscious consumption is understood by many as a first step in a broader, longer-term effort (as in Williams' 2007 popular account of this debate) and that there may be an association between conscious consumption practices and increased social / political involvement (Forno and Ceccarini 2006). However, much of this research has focused on European communities, and the existing research on the subject in the US generally has been limited to qualitative work with local conscious consumption groups, such as local members of Community Supported Agriculture.

The relationship between conscious consumption and social / political activism in the US therefore remains a very important yet under-explored research question. Is conscious consumption in the US a starting point that can lead to more political action on climate change, or does it serve as an end by satisfying people that they have done their part for the environment? Do people move from conscious consumption to activism? What, if any, potential is there for mobilizing individuals as consumers? Climate change and human rights will not be addressed through individual actions alone. However, the question is whether appeals to individual consumption behaviors are a diversion from activism or whether they contribute to constructing broader political movements. It is an important question, and it is one we cannot assume we already know the answer to.

Methods

Procedures

The empirical data used in this paper come from portions of a survey of conscious consumers conducted in the summer of 2008. The research questions that guided the development of this survey focus on the assessment of overall patterns of consumer and activist behavior among individuals who to some extent identify as "conscious consumers." The use of a survey was specifically intended to fill the gap in large-scale, quantitative research on this topic in the US, where literature to date has utilized predominantly qualitative methodologies and small samples.

The survey instrument, which will be described at greater length below and is attached in Appendix A, was written by Juliet Schor, Amory Starr, and Margaret Willis. The questionnaire was revised through two smaller-scale pilot surveys. Following Dillman (2000) and Fowler (2002), the initial draft of the survey was administered to a small group of respondents who then participated in follow-up informal interviews (conducted by phone or email exchanges by the author of this paper). Participants for this first pilot were sought through an online invitation publicized by a Boston-based conscious consumption group, although not all participants were currently living in the Boston area. In all, eight individuals participated and offered their feedback on the clarity of the questionnaire, their interpretation of the questions and answer choices, the length of the survey, and their overall impression of the survey.

After the survey was revised, a second pilot was conducted with the intention of simulating the conditions that would be in place for the survey of the full sample. Therefore, an invitation to participate was sent to a subsample of the sampling frame that

would be used for the final survey, described below. The pilot survey was administered using the open-sourced online survey tool LimeSurvey (limesurvey.org). LimeSurvey was chosen over other online survey tools for a number of reasons, including its capacity for complex skip-patterning and its wide variety of flexible question formats. A total of 402 respondents participated in this pilot (14% response rate), and the results were examined to determine any subsequent revisions to questions, response categories, and formats.

After final revisions were made, the survey was conducted online using LimeSurvey during August of 2008. Invitations to participate and reminder emails were sent directly to individuals by email, with a link to the survey site included in the email. The survey was open for two and a half weeks. These weeks were situated at the end of a summer of high oil prices and not long before major bank failures and steep market tumbles.

The sampling frame for the survey came from the contact list of the national non-profit organization Center for a New American Dream (newdream.org), which is based in Washington, DC, and focuses on the promotion of sustainable consumption and lifestyles. This list consists of about 150,000 unique email addresses, belonging to individuals with a range of experience and interest in the organization and in conscious consumption (as will be explored below), and is maintained by the Center's staff. The goal of using this sampling frame was to specifically engage people who were already aware of conscious consumption to some extent and in a position to be (or become) socially or politically active. This is not a representative sample – not of conscious consumers across the board and certainly not of consumers in the US generally. A more

extensive description of the participants and the ways in which they are a unique group can be found below. Access to the organization's email list was sought by one of the members of the research team who is part of the board of the organization, and relevant results of the survey are being shared with the organization.

The organization substantially contributed to the administration of the survey in a number of ways, including hosting the web domain for the survey, sending invitation and reminder emails about the survey, and also obtaining electronic coupons for a discount at an online green company as incentive for participation (although participation in the survey was not mandatory to obtain the discount, a practice suggested by Dillman 2000).

The Survey Instrument

There are obvious limits for the use of questionnaires since they largely fail to capture nuances of meaning. Questionnaires on consumer practices can present particular difficulties for interpretation. Bourdieu (1984), who relies in part on survey responses for his analysis of taste, notes that surveys about consumption practices tend to treat the use of products as if they were as constant as the objects themselves, even though, in the range of manufactured goods or products that are available, "there are very few that are perfectly 'univocal' and it is rarely possible to deduce the social use from the thing itself" (21). This is particularly the case when new information can reveal that what seemed green or ethical yesterday is toxic or exploitative today. Sassatelli (2006) similarly has noted that an act that has the appearance of 'critical' consumption should not be read as *necessarily* conscientious or public-spirited. Consumer acts that appear to be political statements could in fact be unintentional or motivated by a multitude of other interests. Given these inherent challenges in survey research on consumer practices, the survey was

structured to include separate measures for actual consumer behaviors (e.g. buying a particular type of product) and the meanings and values that consumers assign to their actions. The complete instrument is attached in Appendix A, and a brief overview of the content of the survey and the types of questions follows in this section.

The survey was designed for individuals who were already, to some extent, familiar with the concept of conscious consumption, and it was intended to be as inclusive of conscious consumption practices as feasible within time and length constraints. The survey specifically defined "conscious consumption" for the respondents as follows:

> Conscious consumption refers to any choices about products or services …that you make as a way to express your values. We are interested in the consumer choices you make that are based on values such as social justice, sustainability, corporate behavior, or workers' rights and that take into account the larger context of production, distribution, or impacts of goods and services… Conscious consumption choices may include foregoing or reducing consumption or choosing products that are organic, eco-friendly, fair trade, local, or cruelty-free.

Since there are many conscious consumption practices – and those many practices can each be polysemic – it was challenging to balance the desire to include many practices and definitions of conscious consumption with the impracticality of asking respondents to answer a long and detailed online survey. The length of the survey expanded to 99 items (several of which were matrix items that each included a number of sub-questions).

The survey instrument began with a section asking the respondents to rate the importance of various motivations for conscious consumption (e.g. climate change, personal health, living simply, etc). This was followed by a detailed series of questions about specific consumption decisions across six sectors: energy, transportation, water, food, goods / products, and services (see *Table 1* below for the specific items included for

each sector). Respondents were first asked to rate how consistently they do each item (if ever). If they responded that they did – even if inconsistently – engage in a particular practice, two subsequent questions about that item then appeared. The first asked respondents to rate how much of the practice they do (e.g. how much of the respondents' energy comes from alternative sources, with answer choices ranging from "a little bit" to "a great deal"). The second sub-question asked how long ago respondents started doing the particular practice, with answers ranging from "started less than a year ago" to "started more than five years ago." If the respondents initially answered that they almost never engaged in a particular practice, a question appeared to ask why they did not (with the answer choices: availability, expense, or other).

Table 1 Survey items on consumption practices that were included for the six sectors

Energy	*Transportation*	*Water*	*Food*	*Goods*	*Services*
Alternative sources	Alternative commute	Conserve water	Reduce certain items	Fair trade/ union	Eco-friendly
Reduce use	Fewer flights		Grow own	Green	
	Reduce driving		Reduce meat	Local	
			Cruelty free/ fair trade	Reduce / used	
			Local / organic	Do-It-Yourself	
			Discontinue water bottles		

After this lengthy section about conscious consumption practices, respondents were asked several questions about the impact they believe their conscious consumption to have (e.g. protect the environment, support fair wages, etc) and about the importance of various aspects of conscious consumption to them personally (e.g. learning new things, meeting new people, being avant-garde, etc). The following section then posed detailed

questions about their involvement in traditional political activities in general and also specific to conscious consumption issues (e.g. whether the respondents vote, whether these issues influence their voting, whether they write letters to political representatives, etc), as well as questions about when they got involved in politics, if ever. Another section asked about different methods of information seeking and sharing about conscious consumption, and about how "social" respondents' conscious consumption is. For example, several questions asked whether other people that the respondents know are also doing these practices, and whether the respondents feel more or less connected to a community through the practices. Finally, the survey ended with various demographic questions. Most questions were multiple-choice items and lend themselves to quantitative analysis.

A few questions were replicated from a 2008 Harris Poll on what people in the US are doing in their daily lives to be sustainable, as well as from the US Census and the General Social Survey, to facilitate the comparison of responses from this sample to responses from national samples (see footnotes in Appendix A).

Sample

Of the 18,800 email invitations to participate in the survey that were sent to valid email addresses, 2271 surveys were initiated – a 12% response rate. *Tables 2* through *4* below summarize some of the basic demographics of this sample. The sample has some diversity, but in many ways it is a rarified group. The respondents were mostly white (82%) and mostly female (79%). They were highly educated, with 42% reporting that they had completed a graduate degree. Compared to a national sample (General Social Survey 2000), the respondents to this survey are significantly more likely to be from

different types of communities (Chi Sq(5) = 416.71, p<.001, see *Table 3* below) – with more respondents in this survey reporting that they are from a big city or from the suburbs, and fewer reporting that they are from small towns or farms. In gender, education, and residence the conscious consumers in this sample resemble the Italian conscious consumers in Forno and Ceccarini's (2006) research.

Almost three-quarters of the respondents live in the Northeastern US, and 60% identify as Democrats (with only a sparse 3% who identify as Republicans). Additionally, compared to US Census data (2007), respondents in this sample reported significantly higher incomes in general (Chi Sq(6) = 175.37, p<.001, see *Table 4* below).

Table 2 Demographic frequencies

	Frequency	%	N
Female	1330	79	1694
White	1420	82	1723
Age			1592
M=47, SD= 14			
18 to 30	230	14	
31 to 40	357	22	
41 to 50	344	22	
51 to 60	386	24	
61 to 70	221	14	
71 and over	54	4	
Education			1769
Less than high school	6	*	
High school / GED	65	4	
Some college	209	12	
Two year / Associates	104	6	
Bachelor's degree	641	36	
Graduate degree	744	42	
Mother's Education			1730
Less than Bachelor's	992	43	
Bachelor's degree	437	25	
Graduate degree	301	17	
Father's Education			1700
Less than Bachelor's	839	49	
Bachelor's degree	393	23	

Graduate degree	468	28	
Location			1766
US Northeast	1306	74	
US Other	378	21	
Non-US	82	5	
Political affiliation			1714
Democrat	1036	60	
Independent	290	17	
No affiliation	159	9	
Green	110	6	
Other	74	4	
Republican	45	3	
Has school age children	364	22	1664
Time pressure rating			1837
Low time pressure	400	22	
Medium time pressure	732	40	
High time pressure	705	38	

*Less than .5

Table 3 Comparison of type of community: survey sample vs. 2000 US General Social Survey data

	Survey†		2000 US GSS‡
	Frequency	%	%
Big City	476	27	19.6
Suburbs, outskirts	690	39	23.7
Small town	387	22	41.6
Country village	86	5	4.0
Farm, country home	127	7	11.1

†N=1766

‡ From 2000 US General Social Survey, "comtype"

Survey and 2000 data from GSS are statistically different, chisq(5) = 416.71, p<.001. (Note that there are five degrees of freedom; a sixth category, "don't know" was included in the analysis but not reported in the above table because of very low percentage of response in that category.)

Table 4 Income comparison: survey sample vs. 2007 US Census data

	Survey†		2007 US Census‡
	Frequency	%	%
Less than $10,000	56	4	7.24
$10,000 to $19,999	90	6	11.80
$20,000 to $34,999	167	11	16.55
$35,000 to $54,999	287	19	18.59
$55,000 to $89,999	415	27	21.57
$90,000 to $150,000	357	24	16.23
More than $150,000	139	9	8.03
Rated income as somewhat or very secure	1050	60	

† N=1511 for income categories, n=1759 for security rating
‡ From 2007 US Census Bureau data
Survey and 2007 US data from US Census Bureau are statistically different, chisq(6) = 175.37, p<.001.

The Respondents as Conscious Consumers

Fully 97% of respondents identify as "conscious consumers" and the majority of respondents began their conscious consumption in the 1990s or 2000s (see *Table 5*). About as many respondents very or somewhat strongly agree that most people in their social circles are conscious consumers as those who very or somewhat strongly disagree with the same statement (*Table 5*).

Table 5 Identification as "conscious consumer" and decade when started conscious consumption

	Frequency	%	N
Identifies as "conscious consumer"	1754	97	1810
Decade when started "consciously consuming"			1847
Before 1960s	38	2	
1960s	97	5	
1970s	238	13	
1980s	299	16	
1990s	570	31	
2000s	586	32	
"Most of the people in my social circles also engage in conscious consumption activities"			1772
"Strongly disagree" – 1	106	6	
2	202	11	
3	292	16	
4	416	23	
5	382	22	
6	225	13	
"Strongly agree" – 7	149	8	

It is unlikely that these respondents are fully representative of the full range of conscious consumers in the United States. It is very likely, based on the demographics

outlined above, that white, educated, female conscious consumers[5] are over-represented, although it is also likely that the majority of conscious consumers are white, educated females. At this point, there is no national sample or estimate available of the size or characteristics of the full "conscious consumer" population that these results can be compared against.

One of the broadest estimates of conscious consumers would be The Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) market segment, which is currently estimated at $209 billion in the US, with approximately 41 million LOHAS consumers – one in four adults (LOHAS 2008). This estimate, however, does not discriminate among various motivations for consumer choices. Narrower estimates would include those whose consumption is explicitly values-based, or "conscious." Research from American Environics and Lake Research Partners (Pike et al 2008) suggest that 9% of the US population are among the "greenest Americans" who believe that their "daily actions have an impact on the environment" and act on their values in their purchasing decisions. An additional 3% of the population fall into a group that they call the "idealists," who are cynical of politics and take a more "do-it yourself" approach to living sustainably.

One of the modules in the nationally representative General Social Survey in 2004 asked respondents if they had "boycotted, or deliberately bought, certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons," with 39% reporting that they had done it in the past year or in the more distant past (*Table 6*, GSS 2004a). Furthermore, only 20% of respondents rated boycotting and boycotting as 1, 2, or 3 on a scale from "1 = not at all important" to "7 = very important" (GSS 2004b).

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[5] …who have some amount of technological access, equipment, and savvy, since participation in the survey was predicated on being a member of a listserv and navigating the online survey format.

Table 6 2004 GSS results for questions about boycotting and boycotting for political, ethical, or environmental reasons

[Have you] "Boycotted, or deliberately bought, certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons"? †		
	%	N
Have done it in the past year	24	351
Have done it in the more distant past	15	215
Have not done it but might do it	36	488
Have not done it and would never do it	28	403
[How important is it] "To choose products for political, ethical or environmental reasons, even if they cost a bit more"?		
1 Not at all important	8	111
2	4	51
3	8	111
4	18	261
5	26	382
6	18	253
7 Very important	19	278

†From 2004a GSS question "avoidbuy"
‡From 2004b GSS question "buypol"

While the GSS questions above asked about "products" generally, a recent Harris Poll (2008) came closer to assessing the prevalence in the US of specific practices that are conscientiously done because they are environmentally sustainable. Among their respondents, 53% of individuals from the nationally representative sample reported that they were doing something to make their lifestyle more sustainable. Yet it should be noted that the Harris Poll did not limit "doing something" only to what would typically be considered consumer practices. The two most common actions taken by respondents were recycling (91% of those who said that they were making changes to their lifestyle) and opting for online / paperless bills (73%). Even so, the Harris Poll did ask this sample about several specific consumer practices (e.g. reducing utility use, reducing or eliminating meat, buying green products, etc). Several of the items from the Harris Poll were replicated in our questionnaire, and, not surprisingly, our sample of conscious

consumers engages in all of the green consumption practices that were included in both studies at a substantially higher rate than the Harris sample (see *Table 7*).

Table 7 Comparison of survey responses to May 2008 Harris Poll responses

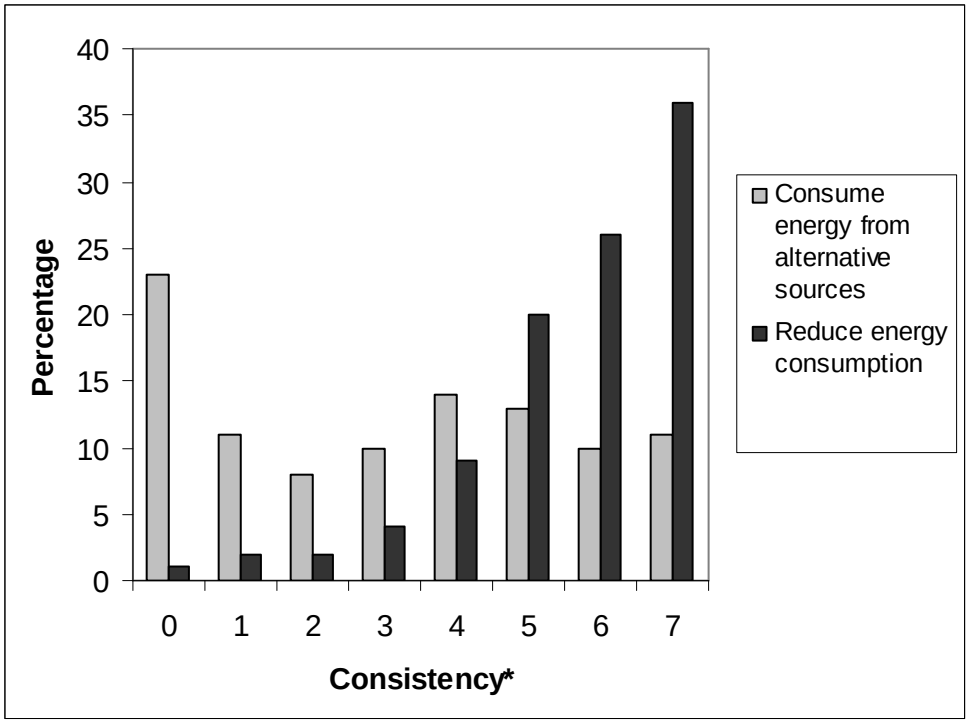
	CCSurvey† %	Harris Poll‡ %
Have you done anything to change your lifestyle to make it more environmentally sustainable?		
Yes	87	53
No	2	25
Not sure	11	22
Of those who answered yes to the above question, percent who:		
Buy green household products	81	47
Discontinue purchases of plastic water bottles	88	30
Take fewer airplane flights	64	22
Commute to work in a way other than an automobile	44	16
Have considered / have become a vegetarian	78	10
Drive less (combine errands, walk more, etc)	90	5
Reduce utility use (energy efficient house / windows, unplug appliances, wood heat, etc)	93	4
Change light bulbs	97	3
Purchase a hybrid car	14	3
Conserve water	87	2

† Data for the first question (change in lifestyle) are based on 2164 responses. Data for subsequent questions are based on the 87% of respondents who answered "yes" to the first question, n=1890. Percents for different consumption practices based on those who answered from 4 to 7 on a scale of "1=very inconsistently" and "7=very consistently" engage in the practice.
‡ Data for the first question (change in lifestyle) are based on full sample of n=2602. Data for subsequent questions are based on the 53% of respondents who answered "yes" to the first question, n=1379.

While the figures presented from the results of this survey in Table 7 paint a picture of uniformly high participation among respondents to this survey, it should be noted that there is substantial variation among the respondents with regard to the consistency of their practices. Individuals vary in terms of how many different types of conscious consumption practices they engage in consistently. And for each consumption

practice that was included in the survey (refer to *Table 1* above for the full list), responses vary across the range of potential answer choices. The distributions for the assorted items are different: sometimes positively or negatively skewed, indicating substantial variation between the practices that were asked about in the survey. Some practices were more commonly engaged in than others, as illustrated by the two energy items presented in *Figure 1* below. While the majority of respondents reported that they consistently reduced their energy consumption, fewer reported high consistency for consuming energy from sustainable alternative sources.

Figure 1 Differences in the levels of consistency reported by respondents for the two "energy" questionnaire items



*Consistency measured as 0= Never, 1=Very inconsistently to 7=Very consistently

These differences across items often reflect perceived and / or real structural challenges to access due to limited availability or prohibitive cost. As in this example, 68% of respondents who said they never obtain energy from alternative sources reported

that the option was not available to them, and 22% reported that the relative cost of this option was prohibitive. In comparison, reducing one's energy consumption in general is an action that tends to be more widely accessible, cost saving, and is more amenable to control by the individual.

In addition to the variety in individuals' breadth and consistency of practices, there are also their motivations for engaging in these actions. Respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of potential motivations for conscious consumption, and, as displayed in *Table 8*, a relatively large percentage of respondents found a variety of the motivations "very important," with the exception of "being avant-garde" and "serving as a model for other people to see."

Table 8 Percentage of those rating various motivations for consumer decisions as "very important"

	%†	N
Living life in accordance with their values	64	2195
Reusing, recycling, secondhand	57	2201
Reducing overall consumption	56	2202
Addressing ecological issues	51	2233
Promoting personal health and product safety	50	2196
Seeking quality products, craftsmanship	47	2205
Addressing climate change	45	2222
Promoting the well-being of the next generation	43	2223
Supporting the local economy	43	2225
Supporting alternatives to the dominant consumer culture	43	2184
Living simply	41	2208
Promoting fair wages and incomes for workers and producers	38	2225
Enjoyment	30	1796
Serving as a model for other people to see	25	2197
Being avant-garde	6	1730

† Percent includes those who answered 7 on a scale from 1= "Not very important" to 7= "Very important"

In order to determine the degree to which these motivations co-vary for respondents, a factor analysis of these ratings for fifteen motivations was run. The factor analysis revealed that all fifteen emerge together as one factor. The factor that was

closest to emerging next had high loadings for enjoyment, serving as a model for other people to see, and being avant-garde, yet it was not strong enough to emerge as an independent factor. This suggests that, although the motivations that seem to be based in self-interest or status (such as being avant-garde) may as a group be slightly different from the other motivations, they actually coexist with motivations that seem to be more other-oriented (such as addressing ecological issues or promoting fair wages). In *Table 9* below, the pairwise correlations are presented for a selection of these motivations that range in their apparent other- or self-orientation. All are positively correlated, and, with the exception of the relationships with being avant-garde, all are significant at $p<.001$. Self-interest, such as trying to maximize personal health outcomes or the quality of products that one consumes, and public interest, such as trying to maximize the outcomes for the environment or workers, do not appear to be mutually exclusive motivations for respondents, as implied by Szasz (2007). There is essentially no relationship between the motivation to be avant-garde and the other motivations (while the correlation with promoting personal health is statistically significant at $p<.001$, the correlation is only .081). The lack of correlation here suggests that while this more status-oriented motivation was not consistently related to other types of motivations in a positive direction, the presence of the motivation also did not consistently correlate with lack of other motivations (i.e. it was not negative).

Table 9 Pairwise correlation matrix, with significance levels, for ratings of the importance of motivations for conscious consumption

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 – Addressing ecological issues	--					
2 – Promoting fair wages for workers and producers	.640***	--				

3 – Reducing overall consumption	.632***	.523***	--			
4 – Promoting personal health & product safety	.544***	.547***	.576***	--		
5 – Seeking quality products, craftsmanship	.511***	.511***	.604***	.682***	--	
6 – Being avant-garde	.034	.076*	.042	.081***	.069*	--

* p<.05, ** p<.01, ***p<.001

Respondents' Social and Political Awareness and Activism

Issues such as climate change and international labor rights have become part of popular discourse in the US – from movies ("Inconvenient Truth") to TV Shows ("Planet in Peril") to the advertisement of corporate partnerships with labor or community (the GAP's "RED" campaign). According to a 2006 General Social Survey, 60% of respondents reported that they were very or somewhat informed about global warming. Despite rising levels of awareness and concern, however, those who feel personally connected to or affected by climate change issues continue to be a minority. Research from the Nathan Cummings Foundation found that global warming remained a "second tier concern" and ranked last out of 16 total current issues tested in the survey (Whaley and Evans 2007). The acknowledged threat of climate change remains distant and low in urgency for most people in the US.[6] Among respondents for this survey, however, the vast majority report that they have a high awareness of climate change (83%) and a high sense of urgency with regards to climate change (88%). It may be that this sense of urgency is an important factor in their motivation to take action as compared to others who are aware but feel less urgency.

[6] Most people in the US are comparatively more distant from the threat of climate change. As Ulrich Beck (1999) notes, there are global risks associated with climate change, but this does not imply "a global equality of risk… the first law of environmental risks is: *pollution follows the poor*."

Table 10 Respondents' awareness of climate change and sense of urgency

	Frequency	%	N
Aware of climate change†	1813	83	2194
Believes climate change is urgent‡	1937	88	2193

†Answered 6 or 7 on a seven point scale ranging from 1= "not very aware" to 7= "very aware"
‡ Answered 6 or 7 on a seven point scale ranging from 1= "not very urgent" to 7= "very urgent"

Respondents vary in their use of different sources of information about conscious consumption, sustainability, and social justice. As might be expected from a survey sample drawn from a listserv that is typically used to distribute e-newsletters, one of the most frequently used source of information was email lists (24% of respondents indicated that they use email lists often). Not only is the use of the internet for sources of information higher in this group than the general population (a 2004 GSS item reports that only 10% of the general public have joined an online political forum or discussion group, either in the past year or in the more distant past – GSS 2004c), it is perhaps also higher than other groups of conscious consumers. Other media were also used frequently, and attending public educational events was least frequent (though it is not clear if that is due to accessibility or availability of such events, or a preference for other sources of information).

Table 11 Percent of respondents who do the following information gathering activities on a scale of 1(Never) to 7(Often)

	Mean (SD)	%† "Often"	N
Use email lists to learn about conscious consumption issues	4.58 (2.0)	24	1774
Read books and magazines about conscious consumption issues	4.79 (1.8)	22	1782
Watch/listen to documentary films, TV, and/or radio programs about conscious consumption issues	4.49 (1.8)	17	1789
Use blogs, online videos, and/or specialized news websites to learn about conscious consumption issues	4.07 (2.1)	17	1784

Attend public educational events, workshops, trainings, or courses on conscious consumption issues	2.69 (1.7)	4	1773

† Percent includes those who answered 7 on a scale from 1= Never to 7= Often

The respondents appear on the whole to be very socially and politically engaged. In the survey, "politically active" was explicitly defined for respondents as "includ[ing] not only participation in electoral campaigns but also a broad range of activities aimed at affecting policy or legislation, including but not limited to: contacting officials, writing letters to the editor, demonstrating, mobilizing other citizens on policy issues, membership in politically active groups, etc." Active involvement in social change activities was defined in the survey as including but not limited to "attempts to transform businesses, institutions, or communities on a large or small scale." The decade in which respondents became socially or politically active ranged from before the 1960s (though only 3% of the respondents in each case) to the 2000s (see *Table 12*).

Table 12 Percent of respondents becoming socially or politically active in the following decades.

	Socially involved (n= 1592)	Politically active (n=1633)
Before 1960s	3	3
1960s	17	16
1970s	14	13
1980s	18	17
1990s	25	27
2000s	22	24

With regard to formal or traditional political activities, the rates at which the respondents participate are noticeably higher than national rates of participation. Only 22% of respondents reported that they had never contacted politicians or agencies, where

the 2004 GSS found that 37% have not "contacted, or attempted to contact, a politician or civil servant" but "might do it," and an additional 20% "have not done it and would never do it" (GSS 2004d). While 39% of respondents in this survey have written at least one letter to the editor in the past two years, only 14% of the 2004 GSS had "contacted or appeared in the media" to express their views in the past year or more distant past (GSS 2004e). Seventy-two percent of respondents have donated money at least once to a consumption related project or cause, compared to only 50% of 2004 GSS respondents who had ever donated to any "social or political activity" (GSS 2004f). Respondents also appear to vote at rates that are higher than average. For example, 89% of respondents note that they "always" vote in federal elections and 65% "always" vote in local elections (as compared to the reported 62% voter turnout rate for the 2008 presidential election, according to the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network). In addition, the majority of respondents report that their voting decisions are often influenced by conscious consumption considerations (*Table 14*).

Table 13 The number of times in the past two years that respondents have done the following political activity in support of conscious consumption causes:

	Never %	1-5 times %	6 + times %	N
Contacted politicians or agencies	22	25	53	1757
Been involved in government hearings	77	18	5	1730
Written letters to the editor	61	29	10	1744
	Never %	1-3 times %	4 + times %	N
Been a member of consumption-related organizations	39	51	10	1744
Donated money to consumption-related projects or causes	28	50	22	1734

Table 14 Effect of conscious consumption on voting among respondents (N=1725)

Does conscious consuming affect how you vote?	
	%
No, never = 1	3
2	4
3	5
4	12
5	21
6	18
Often = 7	38

The majority of respondents appear to be moderately involved in talking with people they know, forwarding information to others, and occasionally getting involved in symbolic actions or projects on conscious consumption issues, although national levels of more informal social involvement are not readily available for comparison (*Table 15*).

Table 15 Responses to "How often do you…" for the following social involvement items:

	Never %	Monthly/a few times a year %	Almost weekly %	Almost daily %	N
Talk to friends about cc	5	47	35	13	1752
Talk to family about cc	5	42	32	20	1721
Talk to others I know about cc	15	52	26	7	1703
Talk to strangers about cc	45	44	10	2	1714
Forward emails / news articles about cc	13	56	23	9	1755
Write a personal email or letter about cc	40	44	13	3	1735
	Range	Mean (SD)	% often†		
Participate in festivals or symbolic actions related to conscious consumption	1-7	3.43 (1.9)	16		1818
Get involved in projects about conscious consumption issues	1-7	2.78 (1.9)	10		1719

† Percent answering 6 or 7 on a scale of 1(never) to 7(often)

Analytic Approach for Regression Models

In order to evaluate the relationship between the extent of respondents' conscious consumption practices and their informal social and formal political involvement after controlling for other variables, OLS regressions were run for a political activism scale and then for a social activism scale (the construction of this and other measures is described in the following section). All data management and analysis procedures were conducted with Stata/IC 10.1.

There was a notable amount of missing data. As noted above, there were 2271 surveys that were initiated on the LimeSurvey interface. After excluding non-US residents (82 cases) and surveys with completely missing data for the variables of interest (26 cases), the initial sample size was n=2163. With listwise deletion, the sample size dropped substantially to only 444 respondents who had no missing data at all for the variables in the formal political involvement analysis, and 446 respondents who had no missing data for the informal social involvement analysis. An analysis of the pattern of missing data revealed that the amount of missing data increased for items that appeared later in the survey, indicating that a number of respondents discontinued the survey before completing all questions. This pattern may have been a result of the length of the instrument. However, the number of questions that individuals skipped was significantly related to whether or not they reported (in one of the first questions in the survey) that they were doing something to make their lifestyle more sustainable. Therefore, it seems likely that the data is missing at random – not completely at random though – in such a way that using a technique other than listwise deletion would be beneficial for estimating parameters (Allison 2002).

In order to improve the estimates, then, Multiple Imputation by Chained Equations (MICE) is used. Unlike maximum likelihood techniques, MICE allows for the use of ordered logistic regression equations in the estimation of imputed values (Allison 2002), which is important for several of the predictors used in this analysis.[7] Furthermore, the multiple iterations of MICE, with a random component included in the estimates, prevents imputed values from being treated as if they were 'real' data points, and therefore avoids the underestimation of standard errors and overestimation of test statistics (Allison 2002).

Fifteen variables related to the respondents' knowledge, consumer behavior, political behavior, and attitudes that were not included in either of the models were included in the imputation process.[8] All variables that would be used to construct scales were entered into the imputation individually, and scales were constructed after imputation. Variables that were used to construct the dependent variable scales (political activism and social activism) were included in the imputation process following Allison (2002) and von Hippel (2007). After imputation, cases that had missing dependent variable data were then deleted since the inclusion of cases "with imputed Y have noting

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[7] Variables with missing data predicted using ordered logistic regression: education, mother's education, father's education, size of town, amount of time respondent has engaged in consumption practices, number of times engaged in formal political activities, frequency of informal social activities.
Variables with missing data predicted using logistic regression: female, white, having school age children.
All other missing data predicted using OLS regression.

[8] These extra variables include: rating of the importance of ecological issues when making purchasing decisions; rating of the importance of living in commitment to values; rating of awareness of climate change; rating of urgency of climate change; whether respondent has changed to energy efficient light bulbs; length of time since changing light bulbs; rating of conscious consumption (cc) ability to make social change; rating of cc's ability to protect the environment; rating of cc's ability to allow one to live in commitment to values; rating of cc's ability to support fair wages; rating of cc's ability of allowing consumers to participate in a community working for change; frequency of voting in local elections; approximate age when began conscious consumption; approx. age when became socially involved; approx. age when became politically involved.

to contribute" and add "nothing but noise to the estimates" (von Hippel 2007: 85). Since the dependent variables were scales, a criterion of having original values for only two or fewer of the scale items was used to demarcate a missing dependent variable. With deleted Ys, the final sample was n=1746 for the political involvement analysis and n=1711 for the social involvement analysis.

Regression diagnostics were tested for each model after one imputation[9] and will be briefly discussed in the results section. Once the model was finalized, 10 data sets were imputed for the final analysis. The combined results of 10 imputations, the results after a single imputation, and the results with listwise deletion will be compared below after a description of the variables included in the analyses.

Measures

Dependent Variables

This analysis includes two different models, each with a different dependent variable: one a scale of formal political involvement concerning issues of conscious consumption, and the other a scale of informal social involvement on conscious consumption issues. Both of these dependent variables are constructed from multiple survey items (see Table 16 below for a complete list of items included in each scale, and Tables 13, 14, and 15 above for information about the distribution of responses for each item).

The formal political involvement scale attempts to measure the extent to which the respondents take part in activities that are often considered to be part of a repertoire of

[9] Results were compared when the imputation process included only cases with 25% or more of the values for the variables to be used in the models, and when the imputation process was allowed to include cases with almost all missing data. The n's did not change notably, and the regression results were robust. Therefore, the imputation presented in this paper was allowed to include cases with almost all missing data.

traditional political citizenship, such as voting or contacting politicians (Putnam 2000; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). The informal social involvement scale is intended to measure the extent to which respondents are engaged in everyday social action and activism on the issue of conscious consumption: in everyday interactions, projects, or participation in symbolic actions. While these activities are not typically considered to be a part of 'traditional political' activism, they are important elements in building and sustaining social movements (Melluci 1989). Neither scale is based on an exhaustive list of activities that might be considered under either heading, but the variety of measures that are included in each should help to reduce the amount of measurement error that might result by simply using a global self-rating of "social involvement" or "political involvement" on consumption related issues.

The items for the formal political involvement scale have a high internal reliability of *alpha*=.727[10], as does the informal social involvement scale at *alpha*=.806, indicating the appropriateness of combining these sets of items into scales. Each scale was constructed using factor analysis since the answers to the questionnaire items were measured in different units. The formal political scale was normally distributed and no transformations were necessary. The scores for the informal social involvement scale were positively skewed, however, so the square root of informal social involvement scores was used in order to meet the OLS assumptions of linearity and normality of residuals.

The two scales are themselves highly correlated (Pearson r of .594 for one imputed set) and emerge as a single item in factor analysis. They are examined

[10] Unless otherwise noted, statistics for the preparation of variables and model diagnostics are based on one imputed data set.

separately, however, in order to note any potential differences in the effects of the predictors, especially differences in the effects of conscious consumption. The two scales focus on different levels of action – and if consumption is as individualizing as it is portrayed to be, it may not be surprising if consumption has a stronger relationship to action closer to the personal and everyday level.

Table 16 Variables included in the dependent variables scales, with alpha reported

Formal Political Involvement *Alpha† = .727*	*Informal Social Involvement* *Alpha† = .806*
Rating of effect of conscious consumption on voting choices	Frequency of participation in festivals, celebrations, or symbolic actions related to conscious consuming
Number of times contacted politicians or agencies about conscious consumption issues in past 2 years	Frequency of talking to friends about conscious consumption
Number of times involved in government hearings on conscious consumption issues in past 2 years	Frequency of talking to family about conscious consumption
Number of times have written letters to the editor about conscious consumption issues in the past 2 years	Frequency of talking to others the respondents know about conscious consumption
Number of memberships in organizations that work on conscious consumption issues	Frequency of talking to strangers about conscious consumption
Number of times have donated to projects or causes that work on conscious consumption issues in past 2 years	Frequency of forwarding emails or news articles to other people about conscious consumption
Overall rating of how politically active respondents consider themselves to be on issues relating to consumption	Frequency of writing a personal email or letter to other people about conscious consumption
	Frequency of involvement in projects about conscious consumption issues

Pearson r correlation of political and social scales for one imputed set= .594, n=1972 (.612, n=1285)
† Alpha reported above is calculated from one imputed set. Alpha after listwise deletion is .718 for formal political involvement and .776 for informal social involvement

Independent Variables

Demographic Controls A number of demographic variables were included as control variables. Age measured in years was entered as bottom and top coded to the initial minimum and maximum values before imputation, since the imputation process

produced a small number of unusual outliers. Specifically, when analyzing only one imputation, 6 cases had values that were unreasonably low and recoded to the original minimum of 18 years, and 11 cases were unusually high and top coded at 80. A dummy variable for females was also entered. As noted above, over 80% of respondents reported that they were White. With such small groups in other racial / ethnic categories, a single dummy variable (White=1, Other=0) was added to the model. Education was entered as a series of dummy variables for "less than a Bachelor's degree" and "Bachelor's degree," with respondents who have a graduate degree as the reference group. Mothers' and Fathers' education was also entered as dummy variables in the same groupings. The degree of time pressure that the respondents feel in their daily lives was added as a set of two dummy variables: high time pressure and medium time pressure, with low time pressure as the reference group. Whether the respondent has school age children is included as a dummy variable. For a summary of these demographic variables before imputation, see *Table 2* above.

Income was top and bottom coded after imputation in order to pull imputed values back into the expected range. Income was negatively skewed, so the square root of the reversed variable was taken, and then the direction of the variable was restored after the transformation by subtracting the transformed scores from a constant. Since current levels of income may or may not be stable for a given individual, a dummy variable was entered for respondents' ratings of the security of their income (somewhat or very secure=1, somewhat or very insecure=0). The values for the income categories and the income security variable before imputation are summarized above in *Table 4*.

Finally, since the size of the town or city people live in has been linked in other studies to both social/political involvement and the degree of conscious consumption (as in Forno and Ceccarini 2006), a set of dummy variables were included for whether the respondent lives in a suburb, small town, or country village / farm, with city serving as the reference group. Initial values for these groups are summarized above in *Table 3*.

Social and Political Involvement Controls Two political controls were included in the model predicting political involvement, and parallel controls for social involvement were included in the social model. The first control variable was the decade that respondents became politically (or socially) active. The meanings of 'politically' and 'socially' active converge with the way they are conceptualized above in the discussion of the sample and the scales for the dependent variables. The decade that the respondent became politically or socially active is included as a rough attempt to account for potential effects of being socialized into various forms of activism within a particular historical moment or cultural context. These were entered as a series of dummy variables for those who became politically (or socially) active before the 1950s, during the 1960s, 70s, 80s, 90s, and then those who became active in the 2000s served as the reference group. See *Table 12* above for a description of the distribution of responses.

A second control for political and social involvement is the respondents' rating of their political (or social) activity five years ago in general. This rating is on a scale from 1(not at all active) to 7(very active), and asks about involvement broadly, beyond involvement in conscious consumption issues alone. Before imputation, the mean rating for political involvement five years ago was 4.00 (sd=1.9, n=1783), and the mean rating for social involvement five years prior was 4.02 (sd=1.8, n=1719). This control for prior

levels of political (or social) activity is included as an attempt to isolate the effect of current level of conscious consumption on current levels of political (or social) involvement. The ratings of political and social involvement five years ago were top and bottom coded after imputation to pull a relatively small number of cases for political involvement (a total of 23 cases when looking at one imputation) and for social involvement (17 cases) into the range of expected values.

Information Scale This scale is composed of five measures of the frequency of seeking out information on conscious consumption issues through various media. Items ask respondents to rate the following on a scale of 1(Never) to 7(Often):

"I read books and magazines about conscious consumptions issues"
"I watch / listen to documentary films, TV, or radio shows about conscious consumption issues"
"I use email lists to learn about conscious consumption issues"
"I use blogs, online videos, or specialized news websites to learn about conscious consumption issues"
"I attend public educational events, workshops, trainings, or courses on conscious consumption issues"

(See *Table 11* for means and other descriptive information.) These questions ask about seeking out information on conscious consumption issues in general, such as sustainability or labor issues. It is expected that higher frequencies of information seeking activities will be associated with higher levels of social or political action. This will serve as an important control variable for the research question, since it could be argued that the information that is necessary for a person to consciously consume is what is primarily driving any relationship between conscious consumption and social or political activism.

The five items have a high internal reliability of *alpha*=.763 and emerge as a single factor in factor analysis, supporting the combination of the items into a single scale. The scale was constructed using factor analysis after imputation.

Conscious Consumption Scales and Variables Two scales were built from the multiple items about conscious consumption practices that were originally outlined in *Table 1*. For each practice, respondents were asked when (if ever) they began the practice, with answer choices ranging from never to more than five years ago. Together, the items had a very high internal reliability, *alpha*=.954 (after one imputation). One factor emerged in factor analysis, and the results of the factor analysis were used to build a scale for the length of time that the respondents have been consciously consuming.

Respondents were also asked how consistently, if ever, they engage in each of the conscious consumption items. These items too displayed a high internal reliability, *alpha*=.842. The consistency of respondents' conscious consumption practices will be of primary interest in the regression analyses and will serve as the main indicator of the extent of the respondents' conscious consumption.

Given that some authors have distinguished between two types of consumer action – negative and positive political consumption (Anderson and Tobiasen 2004) – the distinction was explored for this group of respondents. *Reducing* one's overall consumption is, in Andersen and Tobiasen's terminology, negative political consumption, while *replacing* one's typical purchases with alternative products is a positive act for these authors, since it ostensibly maintains overall levels of consumption by replacing less eco-friendly options with alternative ones. For example, the items in this survey might be categorized as reducing or replacing as suggested in *Table 17* below. In order

to explore whether the consistency measures should be clustered into two scales for reducing and replacing, factor analysis was used to see if 'reducing' items and 'replacing' items emerged as a single or separate factors. The results of factor analysis on all consumption items showed that only one factor emerged. Factor analysis therefore was used to construct a single scaled measure rather than separate reduction and replacement measures.

Table 17 Reduction and replacement scale items

Reduction	*Replacement*
Grow own food	Alternative sources of energy
Reduce certain food items	Alternative commute
Reduce meat	Eco-friendly services
Discontinue water bottles	Cruelty free/ fair trade food
Reduce goods or increase used goods	Local / organic food
Fewer flights	Fair trade/ union goods
Reduce driving	Green goods
Conserve water	Local goods
Do-It-Yourself	
Reduce energy use	

The overall consumption consistency measure was somewhat negatively skewed, so the square root of the reversed scale was taken, and the original direction of the scale was restored after the transformation. The transformation helped the OLS assumption of multivariate linearity to be met for this item.

Finally, the respondents' ratings of how strongly they agree that "most of the people in my social circles engage in conscious consumption activities" from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree) is included and will be tested as a main effect and as a moderator variable in each model (refer to *Table 5* above for distribution of scores).

Regression Results

After one imputation, regression diagnostics were performed and a number of modifications were made in order to meet the assumptions of OLS regression (in addition to the preliminary data transformations mentioned above). Where predictors were treated as continuous, all displayed a linear relationship with the outcome variables graphically and statistically (using the Box-Tidwell test) with the exception of one variable in the first model and two in the second, discussed below.

In the model of formal political activity, there were a number of multivariate outliers with high leverage and high residuals. The estimates of the coefficients and their significance remained the same whether these points were included or excluded, yet the overall adjusted R-square value increased by nearly 2 percentage points when the cases were removed. Since the cases do not appear to have substantive influence on the regression coefficients, they are retained in the sample.

Both models graphically and statistically met the assumption of homoscedasticity of variance and normality of residuals. A number of potential interaction terms were tested,[11] and two significant interaction terms were included in the first model.

Model 1: Predicting Formal Political Involvement

In Table 18 below, the results for a regression of the formal political involvement scale regressed on the predictors using listwise deletion (n=444) are presented in the first column of data, with the results after one imputation in the second column. The combined results for ten imputations are presented in the third column. The overall model results for the different methods are very similar, with between 47 and 52% of the

[11] When non-categorical variables were entered, they were first mean centered, and all main effects were included as well as interaction effects.

variance in current levels of political involvement on conscious consumption issues explained by the predictors.

Table 18 Standardized regression coefficients and significance levels for the regression of Formal Political Involvement on all predictors, with listwise deletion (n=444), after one imputation (n=1746), and after ten imputations

		Listwise deletion	One imputation	Ten imputations
	Adj. R-square:	.465	.515	.518
Age		.147**	.088***	.083***
Education	*Less than BA*	.010	-.035	-.027
	BA	-.032	-.014	-.013
Mother's Edu.	*Less than BA*	-.061	.004	.005
	BA	-.033	-.022	-.011
Father's Edu	*Less than BA*	-.052	-.032	-.035
	BA	.045	-.002	-.002
Income (trans.)		.005	.012	.019
Secure Income		.006	-.011	-.022
Town type	*Suburb*	.030	.049*	.049*
	Small Town	.049	.044*	.039
	Country Farm	-.064	.004	-.005
School child at home		-.006	-.003	-.006
Time Pressure	*Medium*	-.016	.015	.005
	High	.039	.022	.016
Female		-.059	-.092***	-.095***
White		-.044	-.007	-.010
Decade Active	*<1960s*	-.004	-.004	-.000
	1960s	-.090	-.030	-.027
	1970s	-.021	-.004	.005
	1980s	-.029	-.032	-.030
	1990s	-.065	-.020	-.013
Political rating five yrs ago		.407***	.420***	.412***
Pol. rating five years ago, squared		.035	-.041*	-.037*
Social circles CC		.005	.041*	.035
Info seeking		.434***	.389***	.381***
CC Consistency (trans.)		.155**	.193***	.193***
CC Time		.037	.037	.036
Social circles X CC		.030	-.032	-.034*
Female X Info		-.139*	-.128**	-.112**

* p<.05, ** p<.01, ***p<.001

In all, the demographic variables are primarily added as control variables. Even though they are not of primary interest in this analysis, the following briefly notes some of the specific effects for the demographic variables. Education (for the respondents or

their parents), income, security of income, having one or more school age children in the household, race (in terms of being White or not), degree of time pressure, and decade when the respondent became politically active are not significant predictors of political involvement relating to conscious consumption in any iteration. Age remains very significant ($p<.001$) even after partialling out the effect of the decade when respondents became politically active, with older individuals in the sample scoring higher on the political involvement scale (consistent with Putnam's finding that the politically active are "graying"). The type of community that the respondents live in is marginally significant in the imputed models, yet not necessarily in the direction expected. With city as the reference group, respondents in suburbs tended to have significantly higher levels of political activism than respondents in the city when all predictors were added, yet those in country or farm areas tended not to differ significantly from those in the city.

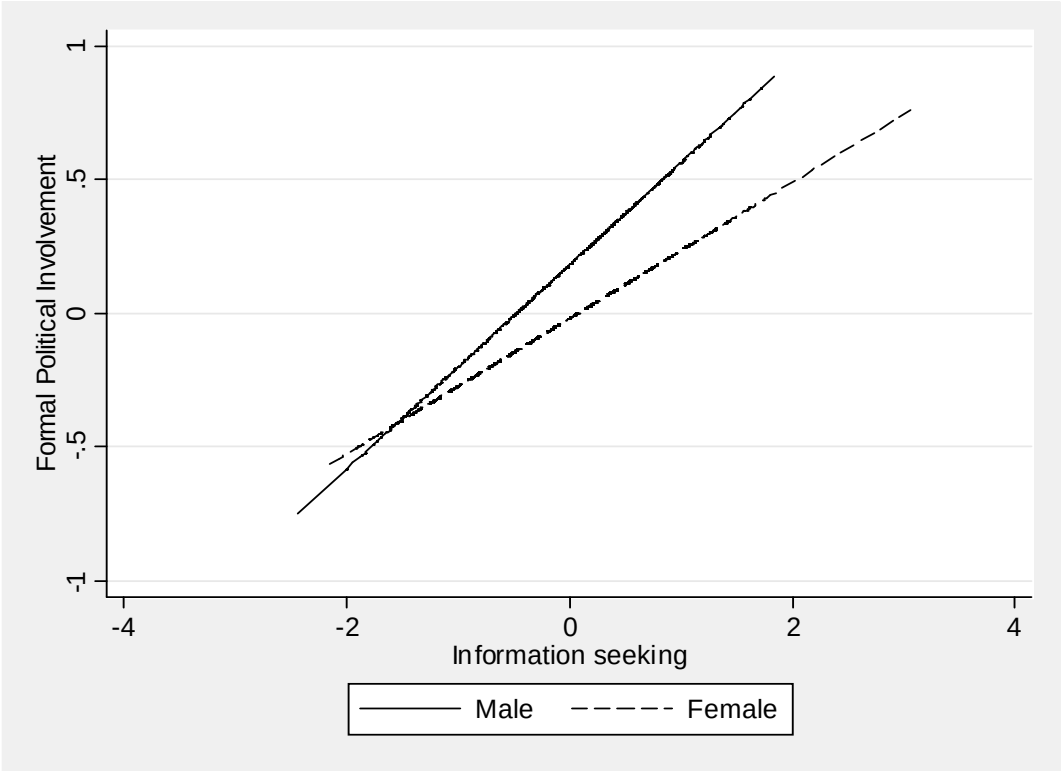
Gender differences are only significant in the models with imputed data, with females having lower levels of political involvement than males when all of the other predictors are held constant. This seems to point to the underlying gender disparities in traditional forms of political activism in general (Verba et al 1995).

The political involvement rating for five years ago was expected to have a strong positive relationship with the current levels of political involvement in conscious consumption issues. There was a strong positive effect (the strongest effect in the model), but the relationship was curvilinear in the imputed models. A square term was therefore entered (both terms mean centered to avoid multicollinearity). The shape of the curvilinear relationship indicates that higher levels of reported political involvement five years ago are associated with higher current levels of political involvement up to a point,

and then the direction of the relationship tapers off and becomes slightly negative. The turning point is at the very upper end of the political rating scale (and was present whether the variable was top-coded or not). There are a number of potential explanations for diminishing 'returns' for higher levels of past political involvement. The pattern could be related to measurement issues: either the lack of clarity about the meaning of a very high self rating of political involvement five years ago, or missing components from the current political activities scale. Or there could be a more substantive interpretation: that it might be a "burnout" effect, where the most politically active individuals five years ago are no longer as politically active in the present. Once again, however, the purpose of including this variable is as a control for past levels of political activism, and including the squared political rating term improves the fit of the model for this control.

Consumption, information, and social networks have a substantial unique contribution to the model above what is accounted for by demographics and political controls alone – if they are removed from the model, the overall r-square decreases by about 18 percentage points (results not included in the table). Information has the largest effect among this last group of variables. As would be expected, higher scores on the information scale, indicating greater frequency of getting information about conscious consumption issues through various media and educational interactions, are associated with higher levels of political activism on conscious consumption related issues. Information seeking also is significantly moderated by gender, as displayed graphically in Figure 2, below. The effect of the frequency of information seeking on formal political involvement is greater for men than for women, though the effect of information remains positive for both groups.

Figure 2 The moderation of the effect of information seeking on formal political involvement by gender



The length of time one has been consciously consuming does not have a significant effect. However, even controlling for political involvement five years ago, current levels of information, and other characteristics of the respondents, the respondents' consistency of conscious consumption is significant, and the third largest effect in the model only to political involvement five years ago and the information scale. Higher scores on the consistency scale, indicating greater consistency of conscious consumption practices across the various sectors and practices, are associated with higher levels of political activism on conscious consumption issues. These results indicate that when holding past levels of political activism constant, as well as current levels of information seeking and other characteristics of the respondents, the consistency with

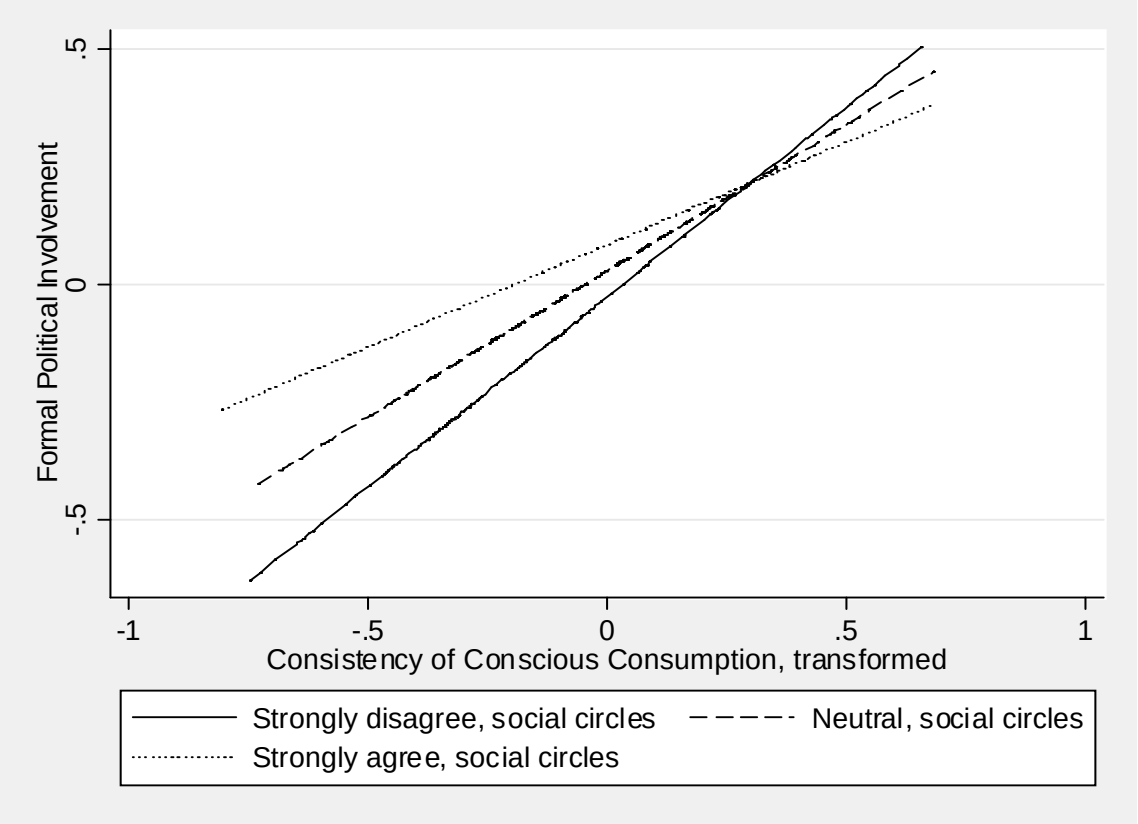
which one consciously consumes still has a significant effect on (or at the very least, a significant association with) levels of political activism.

The main effect of whether respondents agree or disagree that most people in their social circles are conscious consumers is not significant. However, the interaction of the extent of conscious consumption in one's social circles and the consistency of one's own conscious consumption is significant and negative. The interaction effect is not large (and is only significant in the model with ten imputations), but it is substantively interesting for understanding the relationship between conscious consumption and political activism among the respondents. Figure 3 below shows the different relationships between consumption and activism at three levels of respondents' ratings of whether most people they know are conscious consumers (i.e. ratings of "strongly disagree," "neutral," and "strongly agree").

The effect of the consistency of conscious consumption on political involvement is stronger for those who *disagree* that people in their circles consciously consume, and weaker for those who agree that most people do consciously consume. This suggests that when respondents disagree that most people that they know personally are conscious consumers – when they are in contact with fewer people who are engaging in these practices – the level of conscious consumption has a greater 'effect' on political involvement for them. In other words, at low levels of conscious consumption, their political involvement is even lower than respondents with more 'social support', yet at higher levels of conscious consumption, they have greater political involvement than respondents with greater support. Therefore, having more people in one's social circles who consciously consume dampens the effect of conscious consumption on political

activism. The import of this interaction is explored further in the discussion section below.

Figure 3 The moderation of the effect of consistency of conscious consumption on formal political involvement by the extent of conscious consumption in one's social circles



Model 2: Predicting Informal Social Involvement

The results for the regression of the transformed informal social involvement scale (which is a scale of the frequency of talking with others or participating in community symbolic actions or projects on conscious consumption issues) on the same set of predictors are outlined in Table 19 below. There are a few notable differences in the performance of the demographics and other characteristics of the respondents in this model from the political involvement model. Age remains significant (although only after imputation), but while it had a positive relationship to political involvement, it has a

negative relationship with social involvement. Income is now significant as well, with a significant curvilinear relationship to social involvement. In other words, when holding the effects of consumption, information and social networks constant, income has a slightly U-shaped relationship with social involvement (with the turning point closest to the upper limits of income). With these controls added, lower levels of income are associated with somewhat higher levels of social activism on conscious consumption issues, middle income levels are associated with somewhat lower levels of activism, and higher incomes once again display somewhat higher levels of social activism.

Table 19 Standardized regression coefficients and significance levels for the regression of Informal Social Involvement (transformed) on all predictors, with listwise deletion (n=446), after one imputation (n=1711), and after ten imputations

		Listwise deletion	One imputation	Ten imputations
	Adj. R-square:	.491	.509	.513
Age		.026	-.105***	-.089***
Education	*Less than BA*	.053	.036	.046*
	BA	-.024	.006	.005
Mother's Edu.	*Less than BA*	.006	.065*	.066*
	BA	-.015	.000	.007
Father's Edu	*Less than BA*	-.051	-.029	-.038
	BA	.063	.006	.001
Income (trans.)		-.046	-.027	-.035
Income, squared		.095**	.040*	.055**
Secure Income		.000	.003	-.001
Town type	*Suburb*	.035	.054*	.047*
	Small Town	.082	.039	.034
	Country Farm	.045	.026	.030
School child at home		-.008	-.005	.004
Time Pressure	*Medium*	.120*	.081***	.081***
	High	.203***	.106***	.099***
Female		-.002	-.044*	-.042*
White		-.013	.021	.015
Decade Active	*<1960s*	.036	.028	.022
	1960s	.031	.091***	.074**
	1970s	.049	.049*	.040
	1980s	.022	.012	.007
	1990s	.011	.026	.021
Social rating five yrs ago		.178***	.187***	.204***
Social circles CC		.208***	.183***	.172***
Info seeking		.267***	.251***	.277***
Info, squared		.043	.001	.026
Info, cubed		.113	.142***	.117***
CC Consistency		.263***	.200***	.205***

(trans.)			
CC Time	-.140**	-.017	-.024
Social circles X CC	-.084*	-.036*	-.025

* p<.05, ** p<.01, ***p<.001

Gender shows the same pattern as it does in the political activism model: women tend to have lower social activism scores than men. Education, the type of town one lives in, and the decade one became socially involved are not significant or are only very marginally significant. Time pressure plays a larger role in this model. Even after information, consumption, and social network predictors are added, the level of time pressure that the respondents report is very significantly related to their level of social activism on conscious consumption issues. Those with medium levels of time pressure have significantly higher social activism scores than those with lower time pressure, and those with high time pressure have even higher activism scores still.

As in the model for political involvement, respondents' self-rating of their level of social involvement five years ago is a strong predictor of their current level of social involvement, as is their current scores on the information scale. In this model, however, information seeking has a significant cubic relationship with social involvement. The effect of information on social involvement is positive, and the effect is stronger at the extremes of the information seeking scale and weaker in the middle range of the scale.

Even controlling for these other factors, the level of consistency of conscious consumption practices is one of the strongest predictors of social activism. The length of time that one has been consciously consuming is not significant, once again. Respondents' ratings of whether they agree that most of the people in their social circles are conscious consumers now have a very significant main effect. The interaction of

conscious consumption within one's social circles and one's own conscious consumption practices is not present in the informal involvement model with ten imputations, however.

Discussion

In the weakest interpretation of the comparison of the respondents to national samples and the regression analyses, the findings directly challenge the assumption that consumption displaces political and social activism. The respondents as a group engage in more conscious consumption than the general population, and they also are much more politically active on sustainability and social justice issues than nationally representative samples of the US are active in general. And even within this group of conscious consumers, higher levels of consistency in conscious consumption practices are associated with higher levels of social and political involvement after past levels of involvement, various demographics, the extent of conscious consumption in one's social circles, and the frequency with which respondents seek information on the topic are held constant. This suggests that rather than displacing political and social activism, consumption and activism instead go hand in hand for this group of conscious consumers. As discussed above in the analysis of the characteristics of the respondents, the vast majority of respondents place very high importance on living in a manner that is consistent with their values. It makes sense, then, that respondents who are among the most committed conscious consumers – those who are highly consistent in consumption practices across sectors – are also among the most committed to social and political action. Doing so further integrates this commitment to their values across the different spheres of their daily life.

The results suggest that there is a case for claiming that conscious consuming itself drives social and political involvement. While longitudinal data on consumption and social / political actions would be necessary to make a strong causal claim, the results here have isolated a substantial effect of the consistency of conscious consumption on both social and political activism. These consumption practices are not acting as a proxy for the information that one has access to, or as a proxy for having friends and family who are involved in conscious consumption issues, or as a proxy for education, income, or any other demographics of the respondents. Conscious consumption has its own relationship to activism above these other predictors, even when controlling for the respondents' reported level of activism in the past.

The moderation of the relationship between conscious consumption levels and political involvement by the extent of participation in conscious consumption among the people one knows was significant for the formal political involvement model. As noted above, the effect of the level of conscious consumption on political involvement was dampened for respondents who report that they agree more strongly that "most people in their social circles are conscious consumers." This moderation may reflect that respondents who have many conscious consumers in their social circles have a different perception of the extent of consumer action and thus a lower sense of urgency for action than respondents with fewer conscious consumers in their social circles (yet the effect of the consistency of conscious consumption is still positive for respondents with social circles that are saturated with conscious consumers). Alternatively, this effect may support Shaw's (2007) claim that conscious consuming creates a sense of imagined community for many. For those who do not have many others in their social circles who

consciously consume, consumption itself might be providing an integrating alternative that others with saturated social networks do not need.

There was no such moderation for the informal social involvement model, though. For informal social activism, consumption within the respondents' social circles matters for involvement (i.e. the main effect of one's social circles is significant). But if the extent of conscious consumption participation within one's social circles helps to explain the relationship between the respondents' own consumption and formal political action on consumption, why does it not matter for the relationship between the respondents' consumption and informal social action?

As visible in *Figure 3*, respondents who reported lower levels of conscious consumption within their social circles whose own conscious consumption is at low levels tend to have even lower levels of political involvement than individuals who are at the same levels of personal conscious consumption practices but know more conscious consumers. At high levels of personal conscious consumption, however, the respondents with fewer people in their social circles have higher levels of political involvement than respondents who social circles are more saturated with conscious consumers. These appear to be people who are very active but who are acting largely on their own. Given the nature of the political involvement that is measured in this survey – voting, writing to politicians and agencies, writing letters to the editor, donating money, etc – it is very possible that individuals can be "acting alone" and highly politically active on this scale. This is not as much the case for the measures of social activism, however, measured as talking with people about conscious consumption, getting involved in projects on conscious consumption, and sharing information about conscious consumption. Even the

most individualized items on this scale – writing letters or forwarding emails to others about conscious consumption issues – still involves interactions within one's social circles.

The mediation for political involvement complicates that common portrayal of consumers. It suggests that there may indeed be consumers who are acting alone: changing their own individual consumption practices and also taking part in formal political practices that do not necessarily involve much direct interaction with others. But these 'lone actor' conscious consumers are still politically active – and they are not the rule. There is a substantial social component of the relationship between consumption and political involvement for many.

Conclusion

As noted above, longitudinal research on the relationship between conscious consumption practices and social and political involvement would be needed to fully establish a causal relationship. Expanding the population beyond the online members of one conscious consumption organization to be somewhat more representative of the conscious consumer population would also be useful. Not only could this begin to offer a better picture of the conscious consumer population, it may also reveal different effects if a more diverse sample could be drawn. The lack of effect of some of the demographic variables in the model may only be a result of the homogeneity of the sample, and some class characteristics may prove to have important interaction effects with levels of conscious consumption.

Even with the limitations of the sample for this study, the findings for this group of active conscious consumers were fairly robust. The findings that respondents' level of

conscious consumption helps to predict levels of social and political activism, even after holding a number of other predictors constant, strongly suggest the need to rethink fundamental assumptions about consumption that run deep in scholarly literature, and in our culture more generally. The assumption of a lack of political potential at the mall, so to speak, has been naturalized – that is, seen as something immutable and inherent in the site of the market rather than a contingent historical outcome. In the language of sites and practices, the site became seen as capable of only one type of practice—selfish, hedonistic, asocial consumption. This has led to a potential underestimation of the political possibilities of mobilizing people through their roles as consumers. Among these conscious consumers, consumption is not associated with greater individualization and does not distract from political activism. To the contrary, more consistent conscious consumption practices are related to and perhaps predictive of greater informal social activism and formal political activism.

The implication of these findings for scholarly and public discourses about conscious consumption is that criticisms that rely on appeals to these long-standing assumptions about individualized, apolitical consumption do not seem to hold. Rather, it is time to take consumption practices seriously as a potentially political, mobilizing force for a broader social movement for ecological sustainability and human rights.

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APPENDIX 1: Conscious Consumption Survey Instrument

IMPORTANT ISSUES

1. When you make purchasing decisions (including the choice to reduce or avoid the purchase of something), how important are each of the following to you?

	Not Very important 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Important 7
Addressing ecological issues							
Addressing climate change							
Promoting fair wages and incomes for workers and producers							
Promoting the well-being of the next generation							
Supporting the local economy							
Supporting alternatives to the dominant consumer culture							
Living simply							
Reusing, recycling, secondhand							
Reducing overall consumption							
Seeking quality products, craftsmanship							
Promoting personal health and product safety							

YOUR INTERESTS AND VALUES

2. How important or unimportant is it for you to live your life so that it is consistent with your values?

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Important 7

3. How important or unimportant is it for you that your home and daily life serve as a model for other people to see?

Very Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Important 7

4. Do you use any of the following identity words to describe yourself? (Please select one, or use your own word if it is not on the list below)

- Ecologist or environmentalist
- Humanitarian
- Social justice activist

- Vegan or vegetarian
- Locavore
- Voluntary simplifier or Down-shifter
- Conscious consumer
- Combination of the above
- None / I don't like to label myself
- Other:_____

4b. [If answer to 4= "combination"] You selected "Combination of the above" for the previous question. Please select all that apply:

- Ecologist or environmentalist
- Humanitarian
- Social justice activist
- Vegan or vegetarian
- Locavore
- Voluntary simplifier or Down-shifter
- Conscious consumer

5. When we discuss the phrase environmental sustainability, we mean taking from the earth only what it can provide indefinitely, thus leaving future generations as much as we have access to ourselves. Using this definition, have you done anything to change your lifestyle to make it more environmentally sustainable?[12]

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

6. How aware are you of climate change?

Not very aware						Very aware
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

YOUR CONSUMPTION DECISIONS[13]: ENERGY

8. Thinking about your household's **ENERGY** use (not including transportation) and what is available to you, how consistently do you currently do the following when it comes to your household's energy?

	Almost never or N/A	Very inconsistently 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very consistently 7
Use alternative or renewable energy sources								
Reduce utility use (energy								

[12] From Harris Poll, 2008.

[13] The wording of a number of consumption items for each of the sectors in this survey were replicated from the 2008 Harris Poll.

efficient house/ windows, unplug appliances, wood heat, etc)

9. [Based on answers to 8 – respondents only get items where they marked anything but "almost never"]
Approximately how long have you made an effort to do the following (count all years, even if inconsistent)?

	<1 year	1 to <3	3 to <5	5+ years	Not sure
Use alternative or renewable energy sources					
Reduce utility use					

10. [Based on answers to 8 – respondents get items where they marked anything except "almost never"]
Overall, how much has your household …

	A little bit						A great deal
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Obtained energy from alternative or renewable sources							
Reduced utility use							

11. [Based on answers to 8 – respondents get items where they marked "never"]
For items that you marked "never" or "not applicable", please tell us why: (choose the one best answer)

	Availability	Expense	Other:
Use alternative or renewable energy sources			
Reduce utility use			

YOUR CONSUMPTION DECISIONS: TRANSPORTATION

12. Thinking about your or your household's **TRANSPORTATION** and what is available to you, how consistently do you currently do the following when it comes to your transportation?

	Almost never or N/A	Very inconsistently						Very consistently
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Commuting to work in a way other than an automobile								
Taking fewer airplane flights								
Less driving (combine errands, walk more, etc)								

13. [Based on answers to 12 – respondents only get items where they marked anything but "almost never"]
Approximately how long have you made an effort to do the following (count all years, even if inconsistent)?

	<1 year	1 to <3	3 to <5	5+ years	Not sure
Commuting to work in a way other than an automobile					
Taking fewer airplane flights					
Less driving					

14. [Based on answers to 12 – respondents get items where they marked anything except "almost never"]
Overall, how much does your household do the following?

	A little bit 1	2	3	4	5	6	A great deal 7
Commuting to work in a way other than an automobile							
Taking fewer airplane flights							
Less driving							

15. [Based on answers to 12 – respondents get items where they marked "never"]
For items that you marked "never" or not applicable, please tell us why:

	Availability	Expense	Other:
Commuting to work in a way other than an automobile			
Taking fewer airplane flights			
Less driving			

15b. Do you own a hybrid automobile?

- Yes
- No

YOUR CONSUMPTION DECISIONS: WATER

16. Thinking about your or your home **WATER** use and what is available to you, how consistently do you currently do the following when it comes to your home water use?

	Almost never or N/A	Very inconsistently 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very consistently 7
Conserving water								

17. [Based on answers to 16 – respondents only get items where they marked anything but "almost never"]
Approximately how long have you made an effort to do the following (count all years, even if inconsistent)?

	<1 year	1 to <3	3 to <5	5+ years	Not sure
Conserving water					

18. [Based on answers to 16 – respondents get items where they marked anything except "almost never"]
Overall, how much of your water use have you…

	A little bit 1	2	3	4	5	6	A great deal 7
Conserved							

19. [Based on answers to 16 – respondents get items where they marked "never"]
For items that you marked "never" or "not applicable", please tell us why:

	Availability	Expense	Other:
Conserving water			

YOUR CONSUMPTION DECISIONS: FOOD

20. Thinking about your household's **FOOD** and what is available to you, how consistently do you currently do the following when it comes to your household's food?

	Almost never or N/A	Very inconsistently 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very consistently 7
Grow, can, brew, preserve your own								
Reduce your purchase of particular food items								
Reduce meat consumption (Have considered/ have become a vegetarian)								
Buy cruelty-free or fair trade								
Buy local or organic								
Discontinue purchases of plastic water bottles								

21. [Based on answers to 20 – respondents only get items where they marked anything but "almost never"]
Approximately how long have you made an effort to do the following (count all years, even if inconsistent)?

	<1 year	1 to <3	3 to <5	5+ years	Not sure
Grow, can, brew, preserve your own					
Reduce your purchase of particular food items					
Reduce meat consumption					
Buy cruelty-free or fair trade					
Buy local or organic					
Discontinue purchases of plastic water bottles					

22. [Based on answers to 20 – respondents get items where they marked anything except "almost never"]
How much of all items available to you in each category do you…

	A little bit 1	2	3	4	5	6	A great deal 7
Grow, can, brew, preserve your own							
Reduce your purchase of particular food items							
Reduce meat consumption							
Buy cruelty-free or fair trade							
Buy local or organic							
Discontinue purchases of plastic water bottles							

23. [Based on answers to 20 – respondents get items where they marked "never"]
For items that you marked "never" or "not applicable", please tell us why:

	Availability	Expense	Other:
Grow, can, brew, preserve your own			
Reduce your purchase of particular food items			
Reduce meat consumption			
Buy cruelty-free or fair trade			
Buy local or organic			
Discontinue purchases of plastic water bottles			

YOUR CONSUMPTION DECISIONS: GOODS AND PRODUCTS
Goods and products include, but are not limited to:
Health supplements and products, Hygiene and beauty, Appliances, Furniture and lighting, Clothing and accessories, Paper goods, Construction materials, Cleaning products, Jewelry, Shoes, Gifts, Tableware Toys

24. Thinking about your household's non-food **GOODS and PRODUCTS** and what is available to you, how consistently do you currently do the following when it comes to your household's goods and products?

	Almost never or N/A	Very inconsistently 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very consistently 7
Buy fair trade, union made, or sweat free								
Buy green or organic (e.g. textiles, health and hygiene, etc)								
Buy more locally produced goods								
Reduce your consumption of particular items, or buy more used products								
Make your own, do it yourself. Or buy handmade or artisanal								

25. [Based on answers to 24 – respondents only get items where they marked anything but "almost never"]
Approximately how long have you made an effort to do the following for your non-food goods and products (count all years, even if inconsistent)?

	<1 year	1 to <3	3 to <5	5+ years	Not sure
Buy fair trade, union made, or sweat free					
Buy green or organic					
Buy more locally produced goods					
Reduce your consumption of particular items, or buy more used products					
Make your own, do it yourself. Or buy handmade or artisanal					

26. [Based on answers to 24 – respondents get items where they marked anything except "almost never"]
Overall, how much of all non-food items available to you in each category do you…

	A little bit 1	2	3	4	5	6	A great deal 7
Buy fair trade, union made, or sweat free							
Buy green or organic							
Buy more locally produced goods							
Reduce your consumption of particular items, or buy more used products							
Make your own, do it yourself. Or buy handmade or artisanal							

27. [Based on answers to 24 – respondents get items where they marked "never"]
For nonfood items that you marked "never" or "not applicable", please tell us why:

	Availability	Expense	Other:
Buy fair trade, union made, or sweat free			
Buy green or organic			
Buy more locally produced goods			
Reduce your consumption of particular items, or buy more used products			
Make your own, do it yourself. Or buy handmade or artisanal			

28. Have you changed the light bulbs in your home to energy-saving bulbs?
- No
- Yes, some
- Yes, almost all

29. [If answer to 27b is “yes some” or “yes almost all”]
Approximately how many years ago did you begin to change your light bulbs?
- <1 year
- 1 to <3 years
- 3 to <5 years
- 5 + years
- Not sure

YOUR CONSUMPTION DECISIONS: SERVICES

30 Have you ever participated in eco-tourism?
- Yes
- No

31. Do you buy services from businesses that are explicitly eco-friendly? (such as health and wellness services, dry cleaning, insurance, or other services)

Almost never Or N/A	Very inconsistently						Very consistently
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

32. [If 31 does not equal “almost never or N/A”] Approximately how long have you made an effort to buy services from businesses that are explicitly eco-friendly? (count all years, even if inconsistent)
- <1 year
- 1 to <3 years
- 3 to <5 years
- 5 + years
- Not sure

33. [If 31 does not equal “almost never or N/A”] Overall, how much of all available services from businesses that are explicitly eco-friendly do you use?

A little bit						A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

34. [If 31 equals “almost never or N/A”] You marked “almost never” or “not applicable.” Please tell us why:
    - Availability
    - Expense
    - Other

CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

The phrase **“conscious consumption”** will appear in some of the following questions. People make decisions about food, goods, services, and energy for many reasons. Conscious consumption refers to any choices about products or services described in the previous questions that you make as a way to express your values. We are interested in the consumer choices you make that are based on values such as social justice, sustainability, corporate behavior, or workers’ rights and that take into account the larger context of production, distribution, or impacts of goods and services. In addition, there are other values that people express in their consumption choices, such as health, saving money, etc. Conscious consumption choices may include foregoing or reducing consumption or choosing products that are organic, eco-friendly, fair trade, local, or cruelty-free.

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35. Do you consider yourself to be a conscious consumer? Please feel free to comment:
    - Yes
    - No

    Comments:

36. What decade did you start ‘consciously consuming’?
    - Not applicable
    - Before the 1960s
    - 1960s
    - 1970s
    - 1980s
    - 1990s
    - 2000s

37. To the best of your recollection, how old were you when you became involved in conscious consuming?
    - Not applicable
    - Under 20
    - 20-24
    - 25-29

- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60+

38a. Do you ever seek out particular conscious consumption choices of goods or services and find that they are not readily available?

- No [skip to question 39]
- Yes [proceed to 38b]

38b. When you find that your preferred choices are not available, have you done any of the following? Check all that you have done at least several times:

- Research another alternative source
- Ask a source to carry the goods/services you are seeking
- Place a custom order
- Purchase the functional equivalent through a conventional source
- Chose not to purchase the good or service
- Other: _____

39. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

"When I make conscious consumption choices, I feel that I can effectively…	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly agree 7
…make social change							
…directly support fair wages							
…support innovative businesses							
…protect the environment							
…communicate to corporate America that people will pay more for products that serve our values							
…boycott or punish products, industries, and businesses that I disapprove of by spending my money elsewhere							
…live in commitment to my values							
…educate the younger generation							
…participate in a community of people working for change							

40. How important or unimportant are each of the following potential dimensions of conscious consumption for you?

	Very Unimportant 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Important 7
Learning new things							
Connecting with producers							
Meeting new people							
Being outside / closer to nature							
Enjoyment							
Finding higher quality goods or services							
Finding beautiful or elegantly designed items, experiences, or spaces							
Enriching sensory experiences							
Being avant-garde							
Avoiding mainstream styles							

41. Over the last five years, do you see yourself becoming less or more …

	Less 1	2	3	4	5	6	More 7
Engaged							
Demanding							
Mobilized							

42. How often do you, or someone in your household, cook dinner?

- Every night
- Four to six nights per week
- Two to three nights per week
- One or fewer nights per week
- Rarely or never

43. How demanding is your job?

Not applicable	Not very Demanding						Very demanding
n/a	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

44. How much time pressure do you feel in your daily life?

Not much Time pressure						A great deal of time pressure
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

YOUR POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

45. How frequently or infrequently do you participate in festivals, celebrations, and symbolic actions on issues related to conscious consumption (for example: Buy Nothing Day, Earth Day)?

Very infrequently						Very frequently
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

46. In the last two years, how frequently have you voted in federal elections?
- always
- sometimes
- never

47. In the last two years, how frequently have you voted in state elections?
- always
- sometimes
- never

48. In the last two years, how frequently have you voted in local elections?
- always
- sometimes
- never

49. Does conscious consuming affect how you vote?

No, never						Often
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

50. Have you been politically active in ways other than voting in the last two years? (for example, contacting politicians or government agencies, attending government hearings, writing letters to the editor, etc.)
- Yes
- No

51. [IF yes to 50] Please estimate how many times in the last two years you have done any of the following actions in support of conscious consumption causes:
[Note: "Conscious consumption causes" include supporting organic, cruelty free, fair trade, union made, or sweat free production; raising awareness about ecological problems associated with consumption or supporting ecological solutions; or supporting local or small businesses or agriculture]

	0	1-5	6+
Contacted congress people, representatives, mayor, city councilpersons, or state or federal agencies			
Been involved in government hearings			
Written letters to the editor			
Other			

52. How much of the time do you think you can trust the international, national, or local political institutions to do what is right?

	Almost Never 1	2	3	4	5	6	Almost Always 7
International (e.g. UN)							
National (e.g. federal government, political parties)							
Local (e.g. city or municipal government)							

53. Are you a member of any organizations that work on conscious consumption issues?
- -No
- -Yes, 1-3 organizations
- -Yes, 4 or more organizations

54. In the past 2 years, have you ever donated money to projects or causes that work on these issues?
- no
- yes, 1-3 times
- yes, 4 or more times

55. Do you think that the success of the movement for conscious consumption depends on the success of any of the following movements? Check any that apply:
- -labor rights
- -women's rights
- -environmental and ecological protection
- -immigrant / human rights
- -peace and justice
- -anti-imperialism

56. How politically active do you consider yourself to be?
[Note: "Politically active" includes not only participation in electoral campaigns but also a broad range of activities aimed at affecting policy or legislation, including but not limited to: contacting officials, writing letters to the editor, demonstrating, mobilizing other citizens on policy issues, membership in politically active groups, etc.]

Not at all politically active					Very politically active	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

57. What decade did you start becoming politically active?
- Not applicable
- Before the 1960s
- 1960s
- 1970s
- 1980s
- 1990s

- 2000s

58. To the best of your recollection, how old were you when you became politically active?

- Not applicable
- Under 20
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60+

59. Thinking back to 2003 (five years ago), how involved were you in political activities at that time?

Not at all politically active						Very politically active
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

60. How politically active do you consider yourself to be on issues relating to consumption?

Not at all active on consumption						Very active on consumption issues
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

YOUR INVOLVEMENT AND ACTIVITIES

61. To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statement:
My actions related to conscious consumption are primarily for myself and my household.

Strongly disagree						Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

62. How frequently or infrequently do you engage in the following activities?

	Never						Often
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I read books and magazines about conscious consumption issues.
I watch/listen to documentary films, TV, and/or radio shows about conscious consumption issues
I use email lists to learn about conscious consumption issues
I use blogs, online videos, and / or specialized news websites to learn about conscious consumption issues
I attend public educational events, workshops, trainings, or courses on conscious consumption issues

63. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly agree 7
Most of the people in my social circles also engage in conscious consumption activities							
It seems that most people are conscious consumers now							

64. How often, if ever, do you talk to the following people about conscious consumption?

	Never	Monthly or a few times a year	Almost weekly	Almost daily
Friends				
Family				
Others I know (through work, church, or other organizations)				
Strangers (e.g. in shopping spaces)				

65. How often, if ever, do you communicate with other people about conscious consumption in the following ways?

	Never	Monthly or a few times a year	Almost weekly	Almost daily
Forwarding emails and/or news articles				
Writing a personal email or letter				

66. Have you ever been involved in projects about conscious consumption issues?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Many times 7

67. What decade did you start to become involved in social change activities of any type?

[Note: “Social change activities” include but are not limited to membership in social change organizations; attempts to transform businesses, institutions, or communities on a large or small scale, etc]

- Not applicable
- Before the 1960s
- 1960s
- 1970s
- 1980s
- 1990s
- 2000s

68. To the best of your recollection, how old were you when you became involved in social change activities of any type?

- Not applicable
- Under 20
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60+

69. Five years ago (in 2003), how involved were you in social change activities of any type?

Not at all active						Very active
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

WHAT YOUR EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN LIKE

70. How recognized do you feel, if at all, for your efforts regarding conscious consumption issues?

Not at all recognized						Very recognized
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

71. To what extent do you feel a sense of shared identity or a sense of “we” with other people who are making similar conscious consuming choices as you?

Not at all						Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

72. To what extent do you feel that people who engage in conscious consumption are like you in terms of appearance, demeanor, age, stage of life, social class, etc?

Not at all like me						Very much like me
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

73. When I shop at the Farmers' Market, I have…

Fewer interactions With other people						More interactions with other people	N/A, I don't shop at a farmer's market
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

74. When I shop at a fair trade store, I have…

Fewer interactions With other people						More interactions with other people	N/A, I don't shop at a fair trade store
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

75a. Are you developing any new relationships with people who are producing or providing your conscious consumption goods and/or services?

- None
- A few
- Several
- Many new relationships

75b.[if answer to 75a = a few, several, or many] You answered that you have developed a few, several, or many new relationships in the question above. To what extent have you gained a sense of commitment to these people?

Not at all committed						Very committed
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

76. Where do you find encouragement to try new ways of thinking about conscious consumption? Check all that apply.

- While shopping at alternative retailers
- Online
- Through literature and media
- Through community and friends
- At work
- Other

77. Is there any aspect of your consumption that you consider to be an "experiment"?

- No
- Yes

77b. [if answer to 77=yes] You answered "yes" to the question above. Please tell us about the aspects of your consumption that you consider to be an "experiment"

_____

_____

78. What makes your participation in conscious consumption meaningful to you?

ABOUT YOU…

79. What year were you born? [drop down list of years]

80. What sex are you?
- Male
- Female
- Other

81. What is the highest degree that you have completed?
- Less than high school
- High school or GED
- Some college
- Two-year / Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree

82. What is the highest degree that your mother completed
- Less than high school
- High school or GED
- Some college
- Two-year / Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree
- Don't know / NA

83. What is the highest degree that your father completed?
- Less than high school
- High school or GED
- Some college
- Two-year / Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree
- Don't know / NA

84. What is your race / ethnicity? Please check all that apply:
- African American
- Asian American

- European American
- Latino/a
- Multiracial
- Other_____
- Prefer not to answer

85. How secure do you feel in the following areas?

	Very insecure 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very secure 7
Income							
Personal health							
Access to healthcare							
Housing							
Food							
Access to transportation							

86. Which of the following best describes the location of your current primary residence?[14]
- Big city
- Suburbs, outskirts
- Small town
- Country village
- Farm, country home
- Don't know

87. Which of the following best describes the location of your current primary residence?
- US – Northeast
- US – South
- US – Midwest
- US – West
- US – Southwest
- US – other
- Non-US

87b. [if answer to 87 is "non-us"] You answered "Non-US" in the previous question. Please specify where you are from: _____

88.Do you rent or own your current primary residence?
- Rent
- Own
- Other:_____

[14] Wording for answer choices from 2000 GSS "Comtype" variable.

89. What is your yearly household income?[15]
- Under 10,000
- 10,000 to 19,999
- 20,000 to 34,999
- 35,000 to 54,999
- 55,000 to 89,999
- 90,000 to 150,000
- Above 150,000

90. How many people are there in your household? [drop down menu]

91. Which of the following best describes your current situation?
- Single
- Cohabitating with partner
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

92. How many children do you have, if any? [drop down]

93. [if answer to 92 is 1 or more] How old is your child / are your children? (respondent gets as many answer spaces as number of children indicated in 92)

94. What is your current employment status?
- Employed, full time
  - Job title = _____
- Employed, part time
  - Job title = _____
- Self employed
- Not employed, by choice
- Not employed, not by choice

95. On average, how many hours a week do you work in your job or for pay?

Not employed
1 to 20 hours
21 to 35 hours
36 to 40 hours
41 to 45 hours
46 to 50 hours
51 to 59 hours

[15] Categories for income selected in order to correspond to US Census reports for 2007.

60 or more hours

96. Are you a member of a labor union?
- Yes
- No

97. How would you describe your religious affiliation, if any?
- Buddhist
- Catholic
- Christian, evangelical
- Christian, mainline
- Christian, other
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Spiritual but not religious
- Atheist
- None
- Other: _____

98. What is your political affiliation, if any?
- Democrat
- Republican
- Green
- Independent
- Libertarian
- No affiliation
- Other:_____

FINAL COMMENTS?

99. If you have any comments, suggestions, or questions, please share them in the space below:

Thanks for your participation!